



Lifelong Learning Network
Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

Lifelong Learning Network (LLN)

**Study Skills Support for Learners on Higher Education
(HE) level courses, particularly the support required by
HE learners with qualifications gained via the Vocational
& Work-based Learning routes**

PART TWO

A Directory of Current Practice

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| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. Research approach to the consultation exercise | 1 |
| 3. Presentation of the research findings | 2 |
| 4. Current Practice of study skills Support for Learners on Higher Education (HE) level courses | 3 |
| Burton College | 3 |
| Harper Adams | 8 |
| Keele University | 11 |
| Newcastle under Lyme College | 17 |
| The Open University | 19 |
| South Staffordshire College | 21 |
| Stafford College | 23 |
| Staffordshire University | 25 |
| Stoke on Trent College | 34 |
| Telford College of Arts and Technology | 35 |
| University of Wolverhampton | 36 |
| 5. Feedback from students | 42 |
| Acknowledgements | 45 |

1. Introduction

This consultation report is concerned with the development and facilitation of HE 'transition' student support for vocational and work-based students after they have enrolled on courses provided by the LLN partner universities: Keele University; University of Wolverhampton; Harper Adams University College and the Open University and also on HE level courses provided by the LLN partner colleges within Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

Evidence has been collected from a range of providers of HE level courses in the LLN area about their policies and practice of study support for learners. The type and availability of such support that learners with vocational and work-based related qualifications require is the main focus.

The report describes the nature of the study skills support offered to learners and how learners access and make use of that support. It has sought the views of HE Co-ordinators, tutors/lecturers and student support services specialists about the support offered to vocational and work based learners, as well as the learners own views. It is a qualitative report rather than quantitative and looks at the appropriateness, effectiveness and resource implications of the different policies and practices in operation across the LLN's partner organisations.

2. Research approach to the consultation exercise

Using qualitative research methods an in-depth view of the type of study skills support offered to students as well as an overview of the general support available has been obtained. The focus has been on support for students in HE who enrolled with vocational or work based learning qualifications, such as GNVQs, NVQs or BTEC qualifications.

In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with representatives from each of the partner Universities and University College. It has not been possible to visit all of the Colleges within the LLN area but information obtained from six of them does provide a good insight into support arrangements for HE learners within colleges.

Representatives in meetings included: Central Support Managers and Teams; HE Co-ordinators; Course Leaders; Lecturers and Directors of Learning Support Services. Representatives agreed to issue questionnaires to a number of their students to seek their views on study skills support requirements for vocational learners. Very few of these however have been returned.

Partners' websites, particularly the universities websites have also been reviewed to identify how they are used as a tool to provide students with study skills support.

The LLN always refer to 'learners' in the various educational institutions and workplace however most of the representatives involved in the consultation refer to their 'students'. The report therefore uses both of these descriptions.

3. Presentation of the research findings

As considerable information has been obtained about current practice during this research the findings have been separated into two reports: Part One; **'Key findings and summary of Effective practice'** and Part Two; **'A Directory of Current Practice'**.

4. Current Practice of Study Skills Support for Learners on Higher Education (HE) level courses

Burton College

Burton College in partnership with Staffordshire University has recently opened a new University Centre on its campus. The HE courses available range from Higher National Certificates, Higher National Diplomas, Foundation Degrees, Honours Degrees and Masters Degrees. They offer a range of full-time and part-time courses.

Faculty of Creative studies

The Faculty includes Visual Arts, Performing Arts and Digital & Media departments. Whilst there is some crossover between them, in the main they operate in isolation of one another. The HND in graphic design was replaced two years ago with the Foundation Degree (Fd) in Creative Arts for employment. The focus for this Fd is very different to the HND by its total emphasis on vocational learning and its content being student and employer led. Whilst the HND had a work experience element, this is the main focus for the Fd. This is an issue in a small area such as Burton, however an employer forum has been created and breakfast meetings are held in a bid to engage with as many employers as possible to bring in as many 'live' assignments as possible. The students are encouraged to 'go out' and obtain their own contacts in order to gain experience, awareness and appreciation of the industry in which they want to be involved and to build up their self confidence.

This is the second year of the Fd delivery in partnership with Staffordshire University and there are currently approximately 11 Year 1 and Year 2 students. All are full time students from a variety of backgrounds. Some are from employment others are practitioners who want to develop hobbies into businesses by gaining access to skills, facilities, and networks. It is hoped to run the course with some part time Fd students too next year. Most are level 3 students. The mature students generally have met the entry criteria of some prior work skills and some qualifications such as 'O' level English, whilst the younger students have level 3 qualifications- A levels or National diplomas. The College has a policy to encourage progression for all level 3 students, whether vocational, A level or diploma students. Although there is a selection process for course entry there is pressure on colleges to recruit maximum number of students and some students will have gained entry with absolute minimum requirements which means a tutor has to be able to provide immediate support in order for the student to fully achieve on the course. The focus also on prior work skills for entry to many courses does mean that students arrive with **sound practical skills but no prior awareness of academic writing.**

The staff who deliver these courses are all artists or designers and are able to set practical projects which they know will address the competencies for the students. The Fd qualification is based on satisfactory completion of modules and assignments, no exams are set.

Academic writing, including completion of the reflective journal is proving the hardest part of the course for the students. Most have been involved in a practical way with their subject but have not needed to do anything like this before and many have **no experience of English at a standard such as 'A' level** for example. The staff in the department provide additional training sessions to overcome this problem with the students. The College staff themselves have received training via the Faculty they are linked to at Staffordshire University. This addresses the delivery of the Fd as well as the academic support for students and they have been **provided with resources and handouts by the University** to use in either one to one or group student sessions.

The Course Leader states that the normal trait of Art and Design students is that they do not really see the point of 'written work', they are generally good practically but struggle with the basic maths and english standards and quite often have additional support needs such as caused through dyslexia. Often because they have progressed through from the College with basic level 3 entry level qualifications **the problem of the maths and English still follows them as they progress through the HE level course.**

The College's **'Additional Learning Support Unit'** offers a central resource as well as providing a Support worker to the Faculty who support the students via group or one to one sessions. Students can book appointments with her. The issue of funding affects the support offered by the Supported Learning department. The **College is funded to support FE learners but not HE learners.** HE learners have to be privately funded. The **University can fund and support the College's HE students who have a disability or Learning Disability such as dyslexia via the Additional Learning Fund**, depending upon the results of an assessment of needs. Funding for general academic support is not provided however.

Some of the Fd students have gained **mentors from industry** who support and motivate them 'generally' with their course. The small numbers on the Creative Arts Fd courses does mean that students can work together and help one another in an informal basis. Students meet with their tutors **in group tutorials and one to one situations.** If the tutors or the course leader identify issues remedial activities/sessions will be put on for the whole group. Sometimes additional problems are caused if students are seen to be 'singled' out for additional support, seen sometimes by other students as being given special treatment or by the student in question as being highlighted as having problems which others will be aware of. So an 'across the board' approach is taken to address issues.

This does create additional work for tutors and the staff would say they are not necessarily experts in the field of HE study support but make use of the materials provided by the University and base their

support on what they experienced through their own degree courses. It is felt that by integrating and relating the study support into the practical course work the **students appear to respond better to this coming from the tutors who they know well rather than having separate classes.**

The initial units within modules of the Fd do focus on report writing, referencing, dialogue, journals, research and sourcing information from the library. As students complete all Fd modules throughout their course they need to be able to demonstrate communication methods and research approaches. Tutors are able to check throughout therefore that students are coping with the writing and whether or not additional support is required. This ongoing support does rely on tutors being proactive in new course developments and some can be quite traditional in approach, focusing on delivery of the 'practical skills' side of the course. **The approach to support from tutors does vary.** Some provide one to one support on a regular basis but others may not see their students so often and prefer to leave handouts and 'back off' slightly, not wanting students to become over reliant on the tutor. Very often it is felt it is the **'mature' learners who require the most support after being away from education from so long, regardless of their pathway to HE.** There is a balancing act to ensure sufficient time is allowed on this Fd course for the practical side, the study support side and also the 'business side' to enable students to have aspirations, confidence and skills to set up their own businesses as well as working for others.

Students receive an **open invitation to attend a day's event organised by the Faculty at the University** where a series of workshops are on offer regarding university library access, journals, study skills etc. The Course leader believes that this is an important element of the HE courses and helps students to; feel part of the University and not just the college; meet other HE students and gain key information to help start their course off and that should be a standard element not just optional so that more would access this.

The course leaders from the colleges who are delivering the Creative Arts Fd meet together on a regular basis with the University for staff training, standardisation and monitoring training. The other colleges have also raised the same issues for students regarding journals and academic writing. Examples of work have been reviewed during these sessions and issues addressed.

Faculty of Technology

HE courses delivered within this Faculty of the College include; Polymer Technology; Applied Technology; Manufacturing Technology; Mechanical Technology; Electrical & Electronic Technology; Construction courses; Civil engineering; Building services ; Automotive Technology, Computer and Media Technology.

The focus for this report is on the **construction and civil engineering** courses. There are four full time staff at present plus part time staff brought in as required, currently also four. The course leader

is also an Advanced Practitioner. Two year HNC courses are delivered which then allows students to progress onto HND courses in the third year. A range of Foundation Degrees are also delivered, most in partnership with Staffordshire University and some with Wolverhampton University.

College students completing HNC courses are seen usually as a group by the Course leader and advised about progression and requirements to achieve the HND in their subject area.

Potential new students to the College are all interviewed and entry information checked with them. The policy is to ask what has led them to want to do this qualification. If arriving via 'A' level route with no industrial experience they will find these courses hard. Most are recommended to complete a **one year National Award in Construction as a bridge** to industry and the technical aspects of the work and this also helps late returnees to get back into the swing of education, time management etc before starting the Higher level course. As the College offers many NVQ level 3 courses in construction crafts, students who progress via this route to HNC will have had a good vocational and technical base. **The need to communicate the knowledge they have though is often their biggest issue and they have to be shown the finer points of assignment writing and so similarly the National Award is also recommended to these students too** in order to gain study skills experience and become familiar with studying in a different way to the portfolio approach of NVQs. Only a few students tend to progress to Higher level courses immediately after NVQs with others maybe returning a number of years later.

The Course Leader is responsible for student induction and briefs students on the complete range of support available to them, whether it is via the central Student Support Services or Course team. This is included in a half day 'setting the scene' session, which follows a standard induction format. Students sign an induction form to acknowledge information provided in the session.

The demands of the HE course are explained, including the time that must be devoted to studying. **The quantity of work is the biggest shock to students, majority of who are studying part time, with time management their biggest issue.** Only one student is studying full time at present. Around six hours class contact is required a week plus a one hour tutorial session. The type of work these students are involved in often means they are working long hours. The students are studying for two main reasons, some in order to progress further in their careers and some because their current employment requires them to hold the Higher National qualification. Many travel very long distances to attend the courses which also creates additional pressure on their available study time. Most employers are paying the course fees. A small number only allow employees additional study time to that allowed for attendance at college. Effective time management is therefore crucial if students are to achieve fully on the course and at the same time in their place of work. Tutors observe students particularly for this and step in to advise as soon as possible if appropriate.

The Course Leader quoted an example of a student who was struggling with the study and written elements of a course. After consulting with the student it was discovered he was being asked to work extremely long hours at work by the employer as well as being expected to achieve the qualification. In this instance the Course Leader rang the employer and explained the situation and course requirements in order to help provide a solution to the student's problem. This type of **pastoral support is also seen as very important to aid effective studying**. Long hours at work are not an issue that affects studying for all students however. A number of single male students with no family commitments who admit this is a problem have openly remarked on their appreciation of the ability of their fellow students' capabilities at meeting study deadlines, whilst juggling other things, in particular students who are also in full time work, married or with partners and have family commitments, particularly so about the females on the course! The construction and civil engineering 1st and 2nd year courses currently have 15 females on them.

Staffordshire University's online Assignment Survival Kit (ASK) is a piece of software designed to help students plan the time and steps they might need to follow to produce their first piece of assessed work. The Course Leader finds that this is a useful tool to promote to students to help them in planning and time management. The Course team works constantly with students on **time management by bringing it in the practical context of their workplace**.

Students are provided with course handbooks and handouts during the induction session that provide information on the layout, Harvard referencing and completion of assignments. As most are assignment based courses, the Course Leader places **considerable importance on ensuring that students understand the structure of an assignment**. This is covered therefore not only at initial induction stage but at the beginning and within the teaching of each module throughout the course. Time is dedicated in class to cover assignment writing and provided students with the opportunity to seek additional clarification on this if required. Presentation skills are also addressed during induction.

The **College Librarian attends each course induction session and demonstrates how to access the Online Public Access Catalogue and other online information systems**. The library staff are very supportive to the students and also to staff and ensure the courses have all of the latest books available. Students also have open access to the College's Virtual Learning Environment which is Moodle, whether in college, at work or at home.

Students form their own support networks in class, created through their own peer groups. They are able to work collectively to pool their knowledge, put theory into their work context and share with one another which the Course Leader finds is a powerful and important process of learning. He finds that this is when **students from academic backgrounds are able to support their fellow students with the written work and the vocational route students support the academic students with the more technical aspects of the course**.

Part time students can feel isolated and often adult students can seem to be quite petrified about returning to learning. Contact is maintained with them usually via their own email addresses, rather than any college or university ones which they may be able to use. Time is spent in the first three or four weeks **helping them settle into the routines**, getting to know the college facilities and even the car parking as arriving late for class due to lack of knowledge of these things creates additional pressure on the students. **The support for the 'non curricular' elements of the course is believed to be equally as important** in helping them achieve on the course. Information on college policies, discounts and useful contacts are all provided during the induction process. The College has a new university centre where most of the HE classes are held but as yet staff are not based there and so notice boards are not widely used there to provide students with specific HE course information. As take up of HE courses increase at the College it is recognised that the support network will need to increase too for HE students.

Whilst not a standard part of the course, Course Tutors provide additional one to one support if required by any students who may have 'slipped through the maths net' at school and require additional help to cope with the 'analytical method's modules. Considerable time is invested by tutors in providing **informal one to one support** which does get positive results. The courses consistently meet targets for retention and success rates are good. Very few fail and these cases have not been because of the lack of support. Course reports are produced which show quantitative and qualitative markings which is also an incentive for staff to ensure they continue to provide good support to their students. They have not had to refer any of the current HE students to Student Services for any additional support.

Harper Adams University College

Harper Adams University College has around 1,900 undergraduate, post graduate, associate and access students. They are based in one main campus studying a range of courses that support the rural, land and food based industries and businesses and industries that service the rural economy. The majority of first year students are residential.

All first year students have to undertake a **15 credit module called Academic and Professional Development (APD)** which is 100% assessed by coursework. It has three elements: **Effective communication** which includes a report based on the University College's **Report Writing and Referencing Guide; Career Development and Research Methods**. The Personal tutors and the APD module Tutors provide feedback to the students on the work produced for the communication element.

Amongst its range of courses, Harper Adams offers an **Extended Foundation Degree Programme (EFDP)**. Entrance criteria stipulates candidates must be over 17 years of age, preferably with at least five GCSE passes at grade C or above, to include English, Maths and Science at grade C or above. This

is **four academic years in length** and includes a full year of employment with a work placement provider in the third year. Students receive around 16 hours teaching a week involving classroom work, practical sessions, group discussions and projects and are expected to complete at least another 16 hours a week on self directed study, preparation and assignments. Support is freely available throughout. As well as Specialist Modules, **four modules are compulsory and are studied by all students on the EFDP course. They cover the following key skills and basic study skills: Information technology; Academic skills; Numeracy and statistics and Current affairs.**

A Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) award allowed them to build the Aspire Centre. The **Centre for Learner Support** which includes dyslexia, numeracy and study skills is based within the Aspire Centre. A web site which has been found to be valuable when helping address study skills with students who have dyslexia is the **University of Sheffield's audio led website** <http://dyslexstudyskills.group.shef.ac.uk/>.

Students can book individual sessions with a trained Counsellor in the designated **counselling room** on campus. Students with disabilities receive information and support during Open Days which are held four times a year as well as during Induction week for new students. All students receive a one hour briefing on the support provided by the Learner Support Team. **Screening is undertaken for dyslexia and maths support** during this session. Disability support information is detailed on the University College website, in Learner Support Leaflets, through one to one contact and by letter/telephone. **Health and welfare** information is provided during Induction week, workshops and in face to face meetings with Senior Tutors or Personal Tutors throughout the year. **Peer Mentoring** involving students who have had mentoring training has just been introduced and is currently on a trial basis organised by the onsite Counsellor.

Study support is provided by the Centre's Learner Support Tutors ongoing throughout the year via **drop in lunchtime group workshops** as well as via **in-class workshops delivered by the Senior Tutors or Learner Support Tutors** on an adhoc basis as the need arises at any time during the year. The Learner Support Tutor sessions will be at the request of the Senior Tutor. **Individual sessions** are also provided by the Learner Support Tutors and booked by appointment-open access throughout the year. **Study skills resources produced by the Learner Support Team are available to students via their password on the Virtual Learning environment- Moodle.** Leaflets on study skills and disability support, updated by the Learner Support Team are available on campus.

Study support includes:

- Support with **Assignment guidelines** via face to face support with the Module Tutor as requested by students; one to one sessions with Learner Support Tutors by appointment in the Learner Support Centre; and through a '**Writing Guidelines**' paper which is located with other study skills guides in the library section of the main University College website and also in Moodle.

- **Time management, Presentation, Revision and Study techniques and referencing skills** are covered through; one to one sessions with a Learner Support Tutor in the main Centre by appointment; Drop in lunchtime workshops delivered by Learner Support tutors in the Centre throughout the year; a Study Skills Module on Moodle and through handouts produced by the Learner Support Team which are located in the Learner Support Centre; Library staff also help students with referencing skills.
- **Accessing Library Resources/online journals**-Library staff hold a session in the computer room/library during freshers week at the start of term; sessions are held as part of the **APD module** and delivered in the computer room/library in the first few weeks of the first term for **all first year students**; drop in workshops throughout the year and throughout the year students are supported by staff at the Library Help desk which is in the foyer of the library.
- **Maths**-Students complete a maths screening test held by the Maths support tutor during freshers week and support is then arranged if needed; Additional maths workshops are held for engineering students who need help on a weekly basis throughout the year; ad hoc in-class workshops on specific topics relating to the courses are held if requested by the module tutor; drop in workshops for statistics Assignment in APD module are held twice a week between February and May each year to coincide with the statistics assignment; one to one sessions can be booked throughout the year with the Maths Support Tutor.
- **English**-An intensive session is held during induction and regular taught sessions as well as drop in sessions are available throughout the year with the English Language Tutors.

Students are informed about the support arrangements through; the prospectus; welcome pack; induction week activities; leaflets; notice boards; website; emails; lecturers and tutors.

Tutors teaching the APD module receive a list of the Support workshops so that they can promote them in the sessions. **Other tutors receive information via email and posters** around the University College.

There is an **informal method of student referral to the Learner Support Team**-either the tutor will speak to the Learner Support Co-ordinator about a student or the student will make direct contact on the recommendation of their tutor. This works well only because they are a small university college, based on one campus and the main teaching staff know members of the Learner Support Team by name. **Feedback on assignments can vary in clarity**- some are quite detailed others can be less so if class sizes are very large. All first year students undertake two exams at Christmas and in January **receive detailed feedback on their performance including looking at their exam papers**. This is to try and help them reflect on their performances and if appropriate develop their revision/exam techniques preparation for main exams in May. This is the only time that they will receive such support and also to be able to look at their exam scripts. The University College is **looking at ways in which the Learner Support tutors could support this feedback**.

Senior Tutors may know the background and qualification route taken by students on the course but this may vary from course to course. Lecturers could find this information out via the administration computer package but it is felt unlikely they will do so due to the sizes of the groups.

A snapshot of the numbers of students who accessed centrally provided study skills support shows that in 2006/07 108 male and 84 female students received study skills support (approximately 14% of the total number of students) and 1 student with vocational qualifications was mentored. In 2007/08 year 95 male and 108 female students received support (approximately 13% of the total number of students) and two students with vocational qualifications received mentoring and one who held academic qualifications - but an accurate breakdown to show year groups or the type of qualifications they held prior to entry is not currently available for those accessing study skills support. Generally though three times more first year students attended one to one study skills support than in the second year and in the fourth year a little lower than the first year. The third year is low as most students undertake their year's placement then. The **figures also include students with dyslexia** who accessed one to one support.

There is **evidence held that shows that students via a vocational qualification route are less likely to be successful than their peers**. They are currently reviewing how best to support these students. Initial findings are that they **struggle to prepare coursework to strict deadlines** or prepare for unseen examinations and may **find the reduced practical-more academic curriculum than they are used to, a shock**. When reviewing data they have found that there are certain courses with higher levels of students from vocational backgrounds so **it may be that certain courses could be targeted for additional support**. A list of these students has recently been produced and their progress is being monitored. A question the Learner Support Co-ordinator believes appropriate is whether study skills support is more effective if it is integrated into the course rather than being provided separately by the Learner Support Team? She feels that research will indicate that the former is the case. As Harper Adams is smaller than most universities and whilst there are some courses with up to 100 students there is a steady regular tutor base that is able to support students in all aspects of their course work.

Keele University

Keele University is the UK's largest integrated campus university. In 2007/08 it had 6,897 full-time students, 1,429 students engaged on part-time degrees or diplomas and 3266 participants on a variety of part-time short and award bearing courses through continuing and professional education programmes. 2011 (20%) of the student population were registered on postgraduate degree programmes.

Keele University has a **Centre for Learning and Student Support** which is based in a central location on the campus and includes;

Study Support for Learners with vocational qualifications on Higher Education level courses
Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin LLN

- Academic Guidance and Support
- Careers service
- Disability services
- International Student support
- Student Counselling Service
- Student Support

Academic Advisers provide information and confidential advice on course changes; leave if absence and deferral; information about other support services as well as well as **practical study advice to help develop study skills on:**

- time management
- numeracy
- avoiding plagiarism
- essay writing
- revision and examinations
- presentations

Help is provided if students are struggling with the statistics or maths component of courses. Academic Guidance organises **numeracy drop-ins**. These are a chance to work individually with a Tutor on areas students are having difficulty with. Whilst the Centre can provide basic maths a student studying economics for example would need specific maths support from their lecturers/tutors within the department/faculty.

These sessions also provide an opportunity for students to get help with developing their general numeracy skills. An appointment can be made to work with a tutor individually or sign up to attend a workshop. Workshops are usually arranged in semester one. The university website provides details.

The Academic Guidance staff provide exam revision sessions in the period up to Christmas, which are advertised widely for all students. This package of support for example will address 'What does a question mean?' Usually these sessions are repeated before exams, end of November and March each year. There is also an **online study skills tutorial** which students can access. This can receive around 7,000 hits in a month at certain times of the year. The study support is available to all students- no focus is made to engage with any particular student group or those who have a particular range of qualifications.

Counsellors run **relaxation classes**, particularly during the exam periods as well as provision of **counselling support** for a whole range of issues- personal, health or study related. Home sickness is an important issue supported, particularly for international students.

There has always been a **tradition of strong centrally supported study skills support for the health related courses** at Keele University. A **gradual process of change has started to move some of the delivery of this study skills support to the department where the student is working**. Whilst study skills help is now available in the different departments/faculties **some students prefer to go to the central support location to maintain privacy** and keep the support separate from their working areas and lecturers/tutors. If however, centre support staff believe that a student would benefit by involving a particular lecturer or tutor, they will work with the student to encourage them to do this, but will always respect the student's decision.

Most of the **disability support**, such as dyslexia support remains in the central location. The **widening participation agenda** has meant that administration and delivery for some of these disability support services has had to change as administration time controlling some of the support provided is considerable, particularly the recruitment, provision and payment of mentors and ongoing work associated with this. The university now works closely and very successfully with an external agency to provide this. Students supported by the agency still access other support services from the central location, such as living, health and other personal circumstances issues. As well as one to one meetings, focus groups are held each year for students, for example to help set up self help groups for students with Aspergers, provide support and highlight the positives in their situation. Students with disabilities actually have the lowest withdrawal rate from courses

Specific study skills support in maths has been provided particularly for nursing courses to ensure students have the capability to pass key elements of the course such as drugs and dosage. Similarly, additional support has been sought from the dyslexia tutor by the nursing departments to address communication issues that some students with dyslexia face.

Information on this support goes out to staff in all departments wherever located as students can be based at the teaching hospital, in the university or on both sites depending on their courses.

Keele University has a ...'*Welcome to new students*'...page on their **website** which includes information about the first year at university, the changes in the approach to learning and the help available to become an independent scholar. It provides information on the feedback process regarding progress in the first semester - not just at the end as well as the fact that each school will have a First-year tutor or a Director of Undergraduate Studies who will monitor attendance at scheduled sessions and performance in learning tasks. Additionally the specific help available in 'study skills at university', including online electronic tutorials, useful books such as those by S Cottrell and the many other people who can help with such matters is made clear.

Large posters advertising the support available are posted around the university.

Information packs including details of all available student support is given out at Fresher Fairs and

at other induction activities. Personal **tutors all receive information** in order to advise students in their care. **All students have a support tutor.**

As **Admin staff will be key contacts for students** on a regular basis, **they too are invited into the Support Centre for training** to raise their awareness of support services and contacts in order to also signpost students. The **Head of the Centre for Learning and Student Support endeavours to meet with all appropriate staff** that may have contact with students to keep them updated on support available to students. This includes academic staff, student union representatives, the chaplaincy team and whoever students may turn to for help.

Whilst the **Centre drives the policy on students support, departments can deliver the support how they want to.** Most departments are always looking at ways to support their students to achieve without altering the standards expected. The central team supports staff in departments to address the needs of their students, particularly identifying and supporting students with dyslexia. Most staff are skilled at supporting their students and identifying when additional support may be required, whether provided by the Centre or by themselves, having degrees in their own subject area and often with experience at teaching at FE level as well as HE.

The **Independent Advice Unit** also provides confidential, independent and impartial advice to students and this includes academic advice.

A new student statistical recording system (SCIMS) based on the UCAS form categories, which includes such data as parental background, subjects to be studied, ethnicity, disability etc has been obtained during the summer of 2008. Aimed particularly at the disability service to help diagnose students' needs and deliver a better service, this could potentially be used to record additional student data upon commencement as well as services accessed during their time at the university. This has been used for all new students in 2008 and for some 2nd and 3rd year students. Every university department and school will have access to this system. This means that at changeover of tutors a student will not need to repeat details of their circumstances or issues as this will be recorded on the system.

Lecturers provide support to all students and although they can see which qualification route their students have taken they do not assume that a student arriving via a different route or with lower qualifications than another student may necessarily need more support. A student may well arrive with excellent qualifications having always been regarded as a high flyer and as such expectation could be that this student might require little additional support. The change of environment however can alter the student's approach and outlook to their work and they may need as much support as a student who arrives with potentially lower qualification levels. **Different approaches are used as appropriate with students.** Students do self refer themselves to the Centre and are seen as soon as possible through the Centre's appointment system. **Support in all aspects of a student's life is seen as essential if they are to be happy and effective in their studying.**

The Keele **Foundation Year** has been seen as an excellent way to up skill an individual's qualifications. The current foundation year programme provides a means of studying a broad range of subjects before specialising and also allows access to degree programmes for applicants who are qualified in general terms to enter Keele for an honours degree, but who do not meet the specific entry requirements for their chosen course. The foundation year forms an integral part of a four, five or six year honours degree.

There are **few part time students on degree courses**. Most part time students are post graduates who can access support if they need it, but normally they do not need as much support. Post graduate support is funded differently. There are also Continuing and Professional Education day and evening courses for adults.

The process of **referral of students to the Centre for any support is 'informal' but well used**. If the University was larger it was suggested that a more formal system would likely be required. All **new staff have an induction programme which includes information on the role of the Centre and support provided to students**. A staff development programme is provided and Centre staff attend sessions delivered within this programme to provide updates on all types of student support.

There are **few students with 'vocational' qualification** backgrounds. The Deputy Director of Quality Assurance indicated that historically a breakdown of such information hasn't been provided and so exact numbers cannot be quoted, although in principle such information could be provided. The Management Information Team has this year started to produce information to carry out annual course reviews which will yield useful information to identify performance as well as student requirements.

The Centre for Learning and Student Support as well as providing study skills support also provides academic support which does stretch their resources. **Academics lecturing on the courses want to focus on their own subject area and do not want to particularly want to get involved in helping students with basic learning skills** so two years ago the Faculty of Sciences made two appointments of **Student Support Officers** to help students achieve the necessary study skills level. One post has recently been vacated and although this has proved an effective support structure the other post continues only until the end of the year. At the beginning of this academic year the Student Support Officers provided a successful study skills workshop specifically for around 12 new 'mature' students-most with 'A' level qualifications. The School of Psychology has recently introduced **peer mentoring** as an additional support structure for students.

The Deputy Director of Quality Assurance would be **surprised if there was a vast difference between the study skills needs of students with vocational qualifications and those with 'A' Levels**, and feels that **students with vocational qualifications may actually have more skills, such as employability and time management** which will be of considerable benefit to graduates

going into employment rather than into research. Although one of the goals of the Keele University 2008 Assessment Strategy is ...' To ensure that employability skills are embedded in the assessment strategy'... not all of the courses do include a focus on employability skills and so 'A' Level students could miss out on these skills.

All new students need study skills support initially. The University introduced a new degree structure for Humanities and Social Sciences in order to help address the study skills issue. This ensures that in the first year **Personal Tutors** are available to meet with students weekly instead of fortnightly as before to provide support that includes study support. All courses within Humanities and Social Sciences now have to **embed study skills in some way in the first year**. This is a new development and there are issues in implementing this which will take a while to resolve fully. The Personal Tutoring System is intended to **improve student assessments and feedback**. Formative assessments are also carried out with students early on in the first year. Another of the Assessment Strategy's six goals is ...' To provide students with feedback on assessment that is timely, promotes learning and facilitates improvement in their future performance'... Dependent upon class sizes this is not always achieved and so the early formative assessment process is affected resulting in students producing additional work which is not able to benefit if changes in approach are required.

From the Widening Participation Manager's point of view the **transition arrangements between school to college and college to university are the key issue and for all students, not just those with vocational qualifications**. Whilst courses such as Health, Media and Law teach students to see the practice beyond the exams, courses are in the main taught very academically here. The **'softer' networks** such as other students and close family members help students to prepare for, understand and then fit into university arrangements, lectures and their approach to personal study. The students from widening participation backgrounds miss out on this network and so again the provision of appropriate transition support through other methods is important. As well as being involved in the Aimhigher programme, the Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Division offers a range of activities and events. For example a two day 'University: A User's Guide' event was recently held for 20 Year 12 and Year 13 students from the West Midlands which provided an introduction to seminars and lectures with sessions on note taking and related study and library skills.

Whilst the Foundation Year is a good opportunity for students to enter the University without specific entry requirements, study a broad range of subjects and gain study skills experience it is not addressing the needs of individual students. **Assumption is made that all students need a full transition year** which means a whole year's fees have to be paid even **though some could achieve fully in a much shorter time**. The University is currently looking at the LLN's Skills for HE Bridging Module and designing a second module to go with this. Issues need to be resolved regarding how it fits in timescales for enrolment onto main degree courses- when and how it is delivered- separately or

part of degree courses for example, as well as how it is funded. Some of the dual honours degree courses may have capacity within the elective modules, others have no space.

The Personal Tutoring System provides support to students and personal development planning is encouraged, however it is **often the students that need it the most who do not access it** and despite providing information, some still do not turn up to see their Tutors. The Student Union too provides a range of support. For some students however it is just the 'pass' that is their goal and they do not push themselves to gain the 'full understanding' or recognise the learning process and use what is there to help them. The focus for some students and also academics on research as opposed to other vocational careers opportunities may have an impact on this. Many courses here do not naturally fit into vocational areas but because of the diverse options available to students through the choices of courses provided at a number of local universities and colleges let alone ones further a field, developments in some academic areas will likely be slow to change as they address the current student demand. However the **developments in school curriculum and student pathways**, such as diploma lines affects all universities and so staff will need to be engaged to work with students from these routes in the future.

Newcastle-under-Lyme College

The College provides a range of HE level courses including Foundation Degrees (Fds) in Creative Arts for Employment, Graphics and Digital Design, Digital Media Production, Complementary Therapies, Early Childhood Studies, in Education and Telecommunications Management as well as a Foundation Year - BSc (Hons) Psychology, CIMA, HNC Mechanical/Manufacturing Engineering and HNC Electrical/Electronic Engineering. NVQ Level 4 qualifications are also delivered in Leadership and Management, Health and Social care, Management plus CMI Diploma in Management. The Fd, BSc and HNC courses are in partnership with Staffordshire University.

All HE level students benefit from support from Learner Managers, Counsellors and Student Finance Advisers located within the **Learner Services Department**. The Learning Resources Centre provides a range of information to support students' information, study and IT needs. Screening is available to identify if a student needs additional support to overcome any difficulties such as dyslexia or dyspraxia.

The HE Co-ordinator and Learner Services Manager indicate that the College places considerable emphasis on the support given to its students including those on HE level courses. **It is felt that the requirement placed upon colleges by funding bodies and inspectors to have high student retention and achievement rates in order to receive their funding has meant that colleges now have strong student support mechanisms.** The College's lecturers provide study skills support as a core part of their courses and work with students, giving clear feedback on the students' work. College Lecturers are able to build up a one to one relationship with students and provide verbal feedback to students on assignments allowing for a detailed explanation of marks, areas to develop or

build upon. The importance of students receiving clear and preferable, **verbal feedback that they understand fully and can action** in order to progress within their course cannot be over emphasised.

Currently **posters with information for HE students are spread around the College**, however the College is about to embark on a new HE centre which will allow it to provide a much more focused area for its HE learners so that they will gain an improved identity within the College. Posters on specific information such as study skills support could then be centralised.

Many of the students on HE courses at the College have been FE students there and are used to the arrangements and support systems upon which they can call upon. The HE Co-ordinator's and Learner Services Manager's experience is that **HE students who have been on BTEC courses already have experience of independent studying** through the research units which they have to complete whereas sometimes the 'A' level students have been a little more 'spoon fed' regarding provision of information and set work. Tutors also have indicated that by December each year after September enrolment students with 'vocational' qualifications seem to have 'matured' a little more than the ones with 'A' levels.

The Fd courses are a mix of full time and part time delivery and age groups. Mature students are often keener than some of the younger ones as they have made considered decisions about why they are returning to education and are really focused. The tutors may know the background and qualifications of the students if they have been at the College previously but this is not necessarily the case for all.

The Fd and HNC students receive an induction to their courses, **often jointly delivered by the College and University which details the support available** and provides information packs from Staffordshire University which includes information about the library services and facilities, study support services, websites with an A-Z of all of the university services which they are entitled at access. All have University student ID numbers to give access to online resources as well as to libraries. A **member of the University library service provides the students with a session on information skills and the library facilities, including a tour of the campus library**. The HE Co-ordinator also ensures they are aware of the University's Student Union and related services. In their second and third year they also have **access to the Student Guidance Officers at the University** for educational and specialist advice. Details of all the available HE support is also provided in the course prospectus. All of the Fd courses also include a study skills module.

Overall the HE Co-ordinator feels the **need for additional study skills support by students is variable and as indicated before is not required by all students who hold vocational qualifications** - the type of vocational qualification does make a difference, or indeed it is not just those students who need additional support. Most students require support in **time management**

and planning assignments. The approach taken is for lecturers/tutors to support all students with whatever is needed and for students to be fully aware of what other central support is available.

Open University

The Open University (OU) provides courses via **supported open learning** to around 150,000 undergraduate and more than 30,000 postgraduate students. Students study in their own time, mostly in their own homes with help from a tutor, the student services staff at regional centres, and centralised areas such as the OU's library. **Face to face support is provided as well as telephone and online support.** Students can communicate with one another via the OU's online conferencing system, tutorials and **informal study groups**, and events and clubs organised by the OU's Student Union. Over 70% of OU students are studying part time and working full time.

The OU has recently carried out a review of student support which included the introduction of Student Support Teams. Their website references the latest lessons from the **Personalised Integrated Learning Support (PILS) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)** as likely to be valuable when setting up Student Support Teams. As the OU has such diverse programmes-at undergraduate level alone there are over 600 courses offering university level qualifications, there is a difficulty in setting up one support framework that can cover all programmes. The following is taken from their web site;

“ PILS works in three pertinent areas: Ensuring Associate Lecturers bring together curriculum and educational support for students in a seamless manner in a sound pedagogic design; Ensuring academic and educational support staff are drawn together in subject focussed teams to inform and align learner support with the modular curriculum development process and bringing together the advice, guidance and support available to learners in various media to achieve consistency of support.

Level 1 courses are designed to help students get started in a subject and they are especially to bring study skills up to university level. Level 2 courses are equivalent to those taken during the second and third years of traditional university study and require more specialised study, much of which is undertaken independently. Level 3 courses are equivalent to the final year of an honours degree at a traditional university. **Openings courses** are offered which are short courses with lots of support and no exams, giving students a gradual introduction to their chosen subject and the world of studying. These are around 16 weeks in length with approximately eight hours contact support available. These help to **introduce a student to distance-open learning, how to access the student support, online materials and tutor.** There are only about 10 openings course available though. They are looking to see whether a generic skills opening courses might be appropriate as well as the subject based openings courses. The OU is currently looking at the retention and conversion rate of students on these openings courses onto the main courses. **OU courses have open entry so students do not have to meet any particular entry level criteria**, although they will be advised about the best

level to commence at by study support advisers. The achievement rate on openings courses is not as high as hoped for, around 58% achieve. **The question is- should more additional support be provided on the openings courses, with more face to face initial support offered via the Centres or maybe via FE Colleges?** The OU already uses some FE college facilities. A small pilot project is currently running involving Leek College, using their Lecturers to help support OU students with; using a PC fully to access the online resources; networking online; referencing and assignment writing as well as confidence building as this is one of the biggest issues with the students.

All OU students receive a study support booklet. There are three main categories of OU students which means **a range of approaches must be taken** to address their needs. Approximately a third don't particularly want to meet with fellow students or have face to face meetings- they have deliberately chosen this mode of learning because they prefer to work alone. A few would like to meet and receive face to face support but do not want to travel. Around half would like to have more face to face meetings, particularly for confidence building and for mentoring.

Most general courses, depending on their level have face to face meetings, summer schools and a residential built into them. Some have face to face tutorials every month. Generally there is a long term decline in attendance at such but such support does help the students to achieve on their course. The Tutors through their regular telephone or online contact with the student will get to know the qualifications held by them but no particular statistics are produced to distinguish students as ones with vocational qualifications. The role of the tutor in **providing support and building a relationship via the telephone and online system is very important as students will depend on most of their advice and support from the tutor**. Associate tutors are engaged to support the students via interviews over the telephone which helps to assess the skills the tutor has to support and advise distance learners. Staff development days are held for tutors and lecturers to ensure they are fully equipped in all aspects of their role with students.

In addition to the above courses the OU now has a number of **Foundation Degrees** on offer that are specifically designed to address the needs of employers and work based students.

All OU courses are heterogeneous creating very mixed requirements. Student support staff and tutors need to be able to support all of these students. Students will have very varied pre-course qualification levels, enrol on courses at any time throughout the year and can be aged between 17 and 78 years old. Increasingly a younger audience is now being attracted to OU courses.

The **OU website** has dedicated sections linking from its **'Skills for OU Study'** page to support students with their study skills. This has a full range of resources with links to other useful information including; **'Develop effective study strategies'**; **'Active learning'**; **'Assignments'**; **'Revising, exams and assessment'**; **'English for learning'**;' **Using maths and statistics in your studies'**; **'Working with others'** and **'Thinking, reading and taking notes'**.

South Staffordshire College

South Staffordshire College has very recently been created following a merger between Tamworth and Lichfield College, Cannock Chase Technical College and Rodbaston College. South Staffordshire College is part of the Staffordshire University SURF consortium and offers higher education courses, mainly vocational- HNCs, HNDs and Foundation Degrees (Fds). These are delivered at all four of the campuses belonging to the College, including the Lichfield campus. HNCs and HNDs include: Applied Information Technology; Business and Applied Technology; BA Hons Degree in Business and Management, with Fds in over 10 subject areas. Rodbaston Campus also offer a series of Higher Education courses at HND, Foundation and Hons degree level which are run on a partnership basis with the University of Wolverhampton and include animal management, zoo animal management and land based industry subjects.

The Head of Student Support explained how the HE provision had grown and the need for support for students at this level has now increased. Initially not enough support was thought to have been offered to HE learners but now far more support has been put into place as new HE courses have been developed and now that Tamworth and Lichfield Campuses have Higher Education Centres. As a College generally they are very supportive to all of their students. Arrangements regarding promotion of student support may yet change with standard leaflets possibly being introduced across the campuses.

Assessment centres provide the initial screening of HE students with any Learning Difficulties or Disabilities to determine type of support needed. The Additional Learning Funds provides funding direct to the student. Staffordshire University is usually the Centre used for this. As this can take six to eight weeks arrangements are made as soon as a firm offer of a place has been made and accepted. The **Head of Student Support helps to arrange the necessary support for the students in College**, for example help with note taking. If the College feels that a wider group would benefit from similar support they do arrange it.

The University offers some tutor support via its central study skills support team but no additional funding is available to the College to support HE students specifically with study skills on a regular basis. Course tutors will help students with assignment writing as part of their course, the Fds particularly all have initial study skills modules as a core module within the course.

Tutors do need to know more about the central support services and the Head of Student Support has recently started to attend the **bi-monthly HE Committee meetings to advise of the central support available to students and the process for accessing it, she has also started to attend the SURF Student support Group meetings**. The Head of Student Support also carries out staff briefings to make sure all staff are more aware of the support services on offer to the HE students

and will be ensuring staff in all campus locations are informed about the support available via their own internal meetings or by inviting them to a central specific meeting.

Additional support with assignment writing is provided by the Student Support in the Essential Skills and Study Skills Centres on the campuses, often on a one to one basis. At Tamworth campus for example there are Support Workers who support students with personal care and disability support; **Learning Assistants who helps with note taking and Support Lecturers who provide out of class support to help students with their proof reading, research and accessing information skills.**

Many of the HE students are '**home grown**' FE students who will have received and be aware of the support available to them, as will the tutors likely be aware of the support needed by such students with study skills. There is general support information in the prospectus but nothing specific to HE students- which may be reviewed. All students on Staffordshire University Fd awards receive a **welcome pack** with information, including Staffordshire University support and facilities that are available to help them.

At Tamworth the Skills for Life Adviser works with the front line reception staff, Support Lecturers are trained on supporting students with specific learning difficulties including exam support and dyslexia screening. **One member of staff is allocated to work particularly with HE students.**

Part time students receive the same information and support as full time students. Many of the HE students are '**mature**' students. Tamworth campus has used the University Counsellor to support particular students in the past but now use their own Counsellor.

Staffordshire University and Lichfield Campus have entered into a **partnership with Staffordshire Libraries and Information Services** to provide access to students for paper based and other materials in support of a variety of courses delivered on the Lichfield Campus. This service is provided during library opening hours through Lichfield Public Library, which is conveniently situated in close proximity to the University Centre. There is also a special delivery arrangement whereby books ordered online from other Staffordshire University libraries can be collected directly from Lichfield Public Library. A few students only travel to use the University campus library, most access resources remotely.

Stafford College

In association with Staffordshire University, the College offers HNC's, HND's, Foundation Courses, Access Courses and Foundation Degrees (Fds) as well as Level 5 Management courses, C & G Teaching awards and Social Care, CIM and Marketing diplomas. They also have a University Centre for Professional Arts.

75The College provides a range of 'general' support to all students, whether FE or HE. Leaflets are included in welcome packs to all students and information posted on notices along corridors. There is a HE corridor which also has a Staffordshire University notice board which includes information on support available from there. A plasma screen notice in reception is used to provide details of support available. If there are changes to the availability or type of support offered emails are sent to staff college-wide advising them to inform their students. HE Students with disabilities are supported via the Skills and Support unit within the College and via the Disability support team of the University. Funding of some of this support can be an issue. Provision is made to support students with families and where possible flexible and child friendly hours on courses are offered. The College is **very focused on business support and offers courses with hours to suit working patterns for part time students-FE and HE**. General support includes counselling and peer mentoring for FE students. Peer mentoring for HE students is currently being investigated. HE students have access to the Careers department at the College and the University. HE students also have their own tutorial groups. The College has a pro active Student Union which has a mature student representative as well as course representatives who feed information through to the Support staff if help with anything is identified.

Library and Information Services are found in a number of study centres that are subject based for ease of use. Induction programmes on the facilities of the Library and Information Services are offered to all students. Study support varies across the College- considerable guidance is issued and is provided via tutorials with course leaders. The HE students have Link tutors at the College as well as one at the University. There is active interest at the College in Fds and the **relationship between the College Fd Link tutor and the student is strong which is believed to be key** if the student is to be successful. The Fd class sizes are also believed to be important in building up the relationship and allowing tutors to provide the necessary support to all students. All HE courses provide some element of study skills support thread throughout them with the Fds including study skills modules as one of the first modules in each one. Discussions between the College with the various University Faculties indicate that **Referencing** is found to be an issue for all HE students whether based at the College or University with the first three months of a course proving the most difficult for them. The **University Study Skills Support team and SURF support worker from the University Library Services offers to visit all the Fd courses** to advise students about the University resources available to them both on site and online. All Fd courses provide an induction at the University campuses so that they can see the facilities first hand.

The College provide regular Maths focus groups for students who need additional help with maths. The HE students have access to the support information on the University's and College's websites, with access to resources and materials via the College's own Virtual Learning Environment which is Moodle and also the University's which is Blackboard. College Lecturers can apply for Associate Lecturer status with the University in order to access resources and therefore support their student. Specific events and support are promoted via the 'front of house' team and plasma screen and there is a rolling

programme of support which staff can access for their students. The College has a good relationship with employers in the area which it is building upon to further develop its HE provision and HE student support.

The **use of Information Technology is an area which has been identified as an issue for part time mature students who often are the students with vocational qualifications**. The College have recently **piloted the Skills for HE module** developed by the LLN and designed specifically for vocational learners. Many of the learners on this were part time mature students and found the online research and presentations **using IT an issue**.

They do believe additional study skills need to be provided for the HE students but it is not necessarily just the students with vocational qualifications. The College sees it as the 'norm' to provide appropriate support to its HE students whichever route they have taken to study. If students hold 'A' level qualifications they aim to build up their skills- if academic qualifications they aim to provide the necessary study skills and help them to learn.

Health & Social Care department

The Course Leader is responsible for the NVQ Level 2,3 and 4 in Health and Social Care as well as Leadership and Management courses. She was very involved in the development and co-ordination of the **pilot 'Skills for HE transition module'** for the LLN and has provided feedback which is useful to include in this report.

Students on the pilot Skills for HE module in the College were from a number of faculties, including engineering. The NVQ portfolio and assessment route most are used to is a very different approach to learning. The module included 24 guided learning hours plus a two hours additional tutorial. All students were employed and studied part time. Key areas to note resulting from the pilot for potential HE students who may have been out of learning for a while or have entered via the NVQ route is that they **often lack confidence in their own ability; the mix of ages in a group plus studying within a mixed male and female can create issues for some; the students need to be helped initially with the language or 'jargon' associated with HE; for part time students their job is vital and has to come first so studying times and tutorials need to be flexible, many, including some of the younger students who have gained NVQs via work based learning routes do not need or have access to computers or IT in work or even at home and are not as IT literate as might be expected. Researching and accessing information online as well as preparing power point presentations can therefore be quite daunting and a big issue for them**. The module included visits to the university library as well as help with sourcing and using resources online.

An additional element that may also benefit such a transition module and in preparing students in the future could be visiting days to the university for vocational tutors maybe as part of regular staff development days which colleges provide for their staff.

Staffordshire University

Staffordshire University has two main campuses in Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford and a co-funded University Centre in Lichfield (SULC). Nursing and midwifery courses are taught at Stafford and at bases in Shrewsbury, Telford and Oswestry. A number of vocational courses, including a wide range of foundation degrees, are delivered through an established network of further education colleges throughout Staffordshire and into Shropshire. This consortium is known as SURF (Staffordshire University Regional Federation). The University has around 16,000 students.

The University's Study Skills Adviser provided information on the range of support and training available to help students improve their study and academic skills. The **Study Skills Centres** which are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm are relatively new and are **based in each of the main campus libraries** at Stafford and Stoke. The Study Skills Advisers, Co-ordinators and Admin Assistant have been funded through a 2 year Teaching and Quality Enhancement project which is due to end in September 2009. Continuation of central study support arrangements after that date will depend upon the results from the project and availability of future funding. There could well be a change in the structure of the team's activities with more activities embedded into other Departments and Faculties, but this is yet to be decided. Monthly progress reports are sent to all Deans and Director with statistics including numbers accessing support and from which departments.

Support available to students includes; **counselling, disability support** as well as help with **course related issues and specialist information from Student Guidance Officers**. The Student Guidance Officers are based at the Information Centre in Stoke and at the One-Stop-Shop in Stafford. **Faculty Student Guidance Advisors** also provide similar advice, guidance and information to that of the Officers. They are based within each Faculty. A drop-in service is available for initial advice but for more in-depth issues to discuss appointments can be made. Students with statemented Learning Difficulties and Disabilities are supported through the University's **Employability & Student Support team**.

There are two main Libraries at the Stoke and Stafford campuses, together with specialist Libraries for Law at Stoke and Health at Shrewsbury. There are also partnerships with Libraries at Lichfield, Oswestry and Telford. **Library Services** include standard book loan through to unique electronic sources of information, collections and research materials. All Libraries provide computing facilities, flexible learning areas and study areas. Flexible opening times operate Monday through to Sunday. The **main campus libraries are open until 3am on four days of the week including Sundays** (8pm until 3am is self service). Information Services are **trailing 24 hour access** to the Nelson and

Thompson Libraries and selected IT facilities within these buildings from 1st February 2009 until the 24th May 2009. Information Services and the Students' Union are working together to promote this initiative.

There is a slight overlap of study support available to students provided by the Library staff and the Study Support staff but the main focus for support by the Library staff is on how to use the library and online journals/resources; search for information and how to use it.

The Study Skills Support Staff do not have prior knowledge of the qualification routes of students that they may be supporting- support is given to any student who needs help or advice. They are not able to access this information via the theSIS+ corporate information system. The Study Skills Support staff enquire about the qualifications already held by the student during sessions in order to plan appropriate support with the student.

The Study Skills Support Staff **promote their services to every Faculty, working closely with the Faculty's Student Guidance Officers**. Promotional material in the form of posters, leaflets and study skills post cards (that students can post back to the Study Skills team asking for help via internal mail) goes out to all Faculties, Libraries, Careers centres, students' relaxation areas, the One Stop shop on the Stafford campus and via Wardens in the student residencies. A lot of effort is placed in working with the residencies to reach 1st year students. All new students receive Study Skills Support promotional materials in their welcome packs. An A to Z Guide with essential information is also included. Announcements providing links to the Study Skills support, Assignment survival kit and library services sections of the website feature are placed on the front page of the 'My Portal' section of the website which all students and staff have access to. Information is also put onto the LCD Plasma displays around the University as well as on computers as screensavers at certain times of the year. Group emails can be used to send selected information to students if a tutor asks for information to be sent to them. **Considerable work goes on to cascade information as far as possible**. It does depend on lecturers support in this and with so many lecturers part time and who may only work in the evening, it is an ongoing issue. Whilst in theory part time students receive the same support from the Study Skills staff those on courses after 5pm may not have the same opportunities for face to face access with them and reliance is placed on the lecturers to support their students or refer them to information on the web based resources. **A number of Faculties have lecturers who have some of their time funded to specifically help students with study skills support**.

The Study Skills Support Staff **attend inductions when invited**, Health, Computing and Engineering technology Faculties are the ones who involve them the most. A light touch is taken at this stage, although group, whole lecture or one to one sessions can be provided. The **offer to attend inductions is also made to all the colleges delivering Fds as part of the partnership with colleges within SURF**. Some take up this offer, not all. There is a different approach taken by each

of the Colleges with regard to taking up the offer of the University central support services for students. Some work very closely directly with their link Faculty on this area. Logistically it can be difficult due to the spread of the college locations, timing of courses and staff resources available. The Colleges students all receive a University student ID number which is essential when accessing some of the detailed online journal/library information -any delays at enrolment and the issue of ID cards can hold up a student's ability to access such resources. All of the **general support information can be accessed freely however via the main University website**. College HE lecturers can apply for guest status in order to gain ID numbers to access resources in order to help their students.

The Arts Media and Design Faculty invited all the **SURF college students and staff involved in some of their Fd courses to an induction/open day at the University**. Around 150 students attended from 8 of the colleges. The Study Skills Support Adviser also had an input to this and the cross department and institutions arrangement worked very well. The Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Technology also hold **development days to which the Study Skills team is invited to present and bring promotional materials**. SURF college students are also invited to use the facilities of the University whether on campus or via the website and other online resources. A range of workshops helping students with their studying are provided, including a **15 credit Information Skills Module which is run over 10 weeks**.

A number of Faculties use the Study Support Skills staff on a regular basis to deliver certain parts of courses, particularly those that have **study skills as assessed elements of a course**- such as the Fds. Lecturers do not refer students names to the Study Support Skills staff but will indicate if they have a number of students who overall may need support and bring in a member of the Study Support team to help. There are key times to support students including exam time and when assignments are handed in. Some Faculties have **assignment feedback forms** that refer to the Study Skills Support available and attach the Study Skills Support information leaflets when returning assignments.

All students have access to **Personal tutors**. Personal Tutorial discussions between student and tutor may result in the student being advised to see the Study Support Skills team, or to access the on line study support if support cannot be provided by the Tutor. The Student may also possibly inform the Tutor that he or she has sought help, but some students do not want to be seen as having to ask for help. The Study Support Skills staff do not identify students by name to tutors. Whether or not part time students access their Personal Tutor to discuss such information is not known by the Study Support Skills Adviser.

Study Support is **based on demand** but includes **one-to-one sessions, workshops and tutorials dedicated to specific areas of study, including Maths, English for Study and Study Skills. Particular emphasis is placed on; Essay Writing, Note Making, Reading Techniques, Presentation Skills, Oral Presentation Skills, Information Literacy, Time Management,**

Research Skills with guidance through all stages of the assignment writing

process. Frequency of support depends on need and is demand led. An educational psychologist has been used to help with '**stress busting**' and **exam techniques** and has been particularly well received. This session is being provided once a month.

Academic writing and reading as well as note taking are the areas most regularly asked to help students with. Reflective practice and critical thinking are also areas that help is sought- to get some students to 'think outside of the box'. It is felt that GCSE students are coached in these areas but GNVQ students have been 'hand held' a little more and not used to independent study.

The website has a considerable range of information to support students, including interactive Guides, fact sheets, interactive tutorials and links to other resources. The home page of the main Study support section is copied below to show the range of support activities and resources available. The **Assignment Survival Kit** is a piece of software of particular note that helps students plan their time and the steps they might need to follow to survive and produce their first piece of assessed work.

... 'Study Skills

You may well find that studying at University is quite different from your previous learning experiences. We can help you adapt and develop your learning and study skills and offer a few ideas to get you started. Why should I develop my study skills?

Help and Advice

The newly established Study Skills Centres at each of our main Campus Libraries, offer a range of support and training for all students who are keen to improve their study and academic skills.

Visit: Study Skills Centres

To request an appointment with a member of the Study Skills team please complete our on-line enquiry form

Online Tools

- Assignment Survival Kit (ASK)
- PebblePad ePortfolio system
- RefWorks - the Online Bibliography Management Tool
- Turnitin - Online Plagiarism Prevention

Self Paced Guides and Useful Websites

- Links to self paced guides and useful Study Skills Websites.
- Study Skills Books and Guides in the Library
- Key Skills Online - Evaluate and Develop your Key Skills
- SkillPack Masters Guides
- Palgrave Study Guides
- John Ramsay's Learning and Grade Improvement Techniques Website
- BBC Key Skills Website
- University of Surrey's Skills Material

Researching - Resources to Improve your Skills

- Research Skills - How to Look for Information
- Referencing and Plagiarism - Acknowledging your Sources of Information
- Evaluating the quality of information on the web
- Using Library eResources

Communication - Resources to Improve your Skills

- Writing Skills - Note Taking, Essays, Reports and Dissertations
- Presentation Skills
- Working with Others - Team Building Skills
- IT Skills and Computer Literacy

Learning Styles and Ability - Resources to Improve your Skills

- Studying Independently and Producing Better Written Work
- Time Management - Planning your Work
- Improving your Learning Styles and Ability - How to Get Good Grades
- Exams and Revision Techniques
- Maths and Numeracy - Working with Numbers and Data
- Good working practices for students ...'

Faculty of Sciences

Courses looked at in relation to this project within the Faculty include the BA Early Childhood Studies, the BA(Hons) Early Childhood Studies award and the Foundation Degree (Fd) Early Childhood Studies/Early Years. The BA(Hons) is designed to enable students with a Fd in Early Childhood Studies or Early Years (or a similar, relevant qualification, such as Fd degree or HND in Teaching Assistants or Play work) to top up to a full honours degree in Early Childhood Studies. Applicants for the programme must be in employment (paid or voluntary) within an early years setting for at least two days per week.

The BA(Hons) Early Childhood Studies is a modular award within an undergraduate framework. It is studied on a part-time basis over four terms - each of ten weeks duration. This qualification is designed for practitioners who are currently employed (either paid or voluntary) in an early years environment. Currently around two thirds of the BA top-up students have vocational qualifications as opposed to 'A' levels.

A vocationally-orientated Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies/Early Years has also been developed and is delivered within the Faculty who also co-ordinate the delivery of this Fd through their partner colleges across the LLN area. A good deal of the learning on this course takes place in the workplace, **using study guidance and the experience of colleagues**. Every student has a personal tutor to assist them and is expected to attend university or college weekly. **Further tutor support is available through email and telephone**. Entry requirements for this Fd include a relevant and current level 3 childcare/ playwork/early years qualification such as NNEB, DNN, DCE, BTEC National Diploma, NVQ3 in Early Years Care and Education or their equivalent with two years' post-qualifying experience. The sector requires those involved in Early Years work to have an appropriate qualification and Government funding is currently available to pay students' course fees.

The University has recently introduced new procedures and materials to ensure that the colleges all deliver the same Early Years Fd modules and adopt the use of standard Personal Development Plans with their students to ensure those that progress onto BA courses will have a comparable standard of PDPs. College staff join University staff for the Fd standardisation and pre assignment module meetings during which any issues around study skills or other support required can be included. Ideally course tutors should attend but this is not always possible as some of the tutors' only work in the evenings, but colleges always send a representative who will then feed back. The materials have recently been put onto the **University's VLE-Blackboard** and college tutors are encouraged to access materials from there.

The deliverers (University and Colleges) are responsible for arranging their own student inductions during which, information is provided on library skills and also how to access the other types of support available to aid studying and course completion. One of the **Sciences Subject Librarians** attends the initial induction for the Faculty's own students and provides information on library resources. Student welcome packs are sent by the central support team and include leaflets on the full range of student facilities and support available plus post cards asking for support which they should send to the **University Study Skills team** if they need help at any time. These induction packs are also sent out to all partner colleges for their HE students The University Study Skills team and/or Subject librarians also offer to visit the partner Colleges delivering the Fd and brief students about the University study support and library facilities also available to them. Some of the Colleges take up this offer but not all. Generally few of the Colleges students' use the facilities on the University campuses, even the College students located near to the University campuses, however all have university ID numbers and can

access the online library resources and study support information via the University website. Although the University Senior Lecturer for the Fd and BA has contact with the University Sciences Subject Librarian and the Study Skills Support Co-ordinator to discuss solutions to any apparent support issues required by the students she is not aware of receiving any statistics from the central support services advising of the number of students from her courses who may have accessed central support, whether University or the College based HE students.

It was emphasised that **small class sizes do allow lecturers to give more intensive study support to students**, even on a one to one basis and so central support services do not need to be called upon so often, however for large groups such as those on Psychology courses it would not be possible for lecturers to provide the same amount of intensive study support. As the **Fd and BA courses are fairly small in student numbers** the University lecturers are able to regularly provide their students with the study and other appropriate support as a natural element of the course. Both the senior and main course University Lecturers have recent college backgrounds and so feel they may have a **'non traditional' university approach when providing support to their students**. The approach taken on the courses is that the students are **'non traditional' students** and as such are given the type of support and contact with tutors as they may have in colleges. It is felt lecturer awareness of student issues and background and the relationship between lecturer and student is key to enabling the student to fully achieve on the course. If the University lecturers feel there are issues that the central learning support team or Faculty librarians can additionally help with then specific sessions are arranged. **Excel** spreadsheet sessions for example have been arranged via the Study Support team and also sessions on **'referencing'** which seems to be an ongoing problem for the Fd students and which the lecturers constantly have to work on with students. This is despite the fact that the **initial module of the Fd includes Study Skills, Reflective Practice and Personal Development**.

The Colleges' students have similar problems. In a move to gain consistency of standard in delivery of the study skills modules the Faculty is working with the central Learning Support team to see if the Fd study skills modules can be delivered by University staff in all locations. This does depend upon available resources- human and financial. The University central Support services, whether for study support or addressing a disability are found to be really good but limited human resources mean that they are available mainly for full time students or part time students who attend University for at least 1 day per week. Part time students who only attend for an evening often have full time quite demanding jobs that restrict them accessing the central study support services during their Monday to Friday 9-5 opening hours. **Provision of study skills support by Lecturers for these part time evening students is therefore very important.**

The point was made that vocational pathway students may not necessarily be more likely to drop out of their courses than 'A' level students; **often vocational students are far more focused about what**

they want to do and achieve, and will make use of all support and opportunities whilst 'A' level students may not always be sure about what they want to do or achieve and can be less focused. Also, there are different modes of study for vocational qualifications which means that **not all students with vocational qualifications may be identified as requiring more study skills support than academic qualification route students**; students who have completed qualifications such as BTEC or CACHE diplomas will have experienced academic writing and be as familiar with such as 'A' level students. NVQ students on the other hand will be more familiar with competency based portfolio based work and likely have no experience of academic writing.

A '**Study Buddy**' initiative has very recently been introduced to 20 students during their Research module in the final year of their Early Childhood Studies course. Whilst this idea might have proved risky to introduce in first two years of their course because of common general assignments, all students are now carrying out different types of research and should not be worried about other students seeing their work or using their ideas etc, if they might have been before? The idea has been introduced to them and they have paired themselves up with fellow students in their group with the intention that they can support and advise one another during their research process, meet up at convenient times, likely before or after their weekly lectures and keep in regular contact through email and telephone. As yet, it is too early to say if this 'peer mentoring' approach is effective in helping them with their studying or not.

Business School

The course focused on for this report is the three years part time Foundation Degree in Education (Fd)-Teaching Assistants (TA). As with the Early Years Fd, the Fd (TA) is delivered through a partnership with seven local colleges within the Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF) partnership as well as by one in Greater Manchester and one in Birmingham. The Education department of the University's Business School organises, administers and ensures the quality of provision and the College lecturers deliver the course. **Similar to the Early Years Lecturers, the Senior Lecturer responsible for the TA course has a background in Further Education Colleges and aware of the support arrangements in colleges.** The course is delivered in either the Childcare or Early Years departments of the Colleges.

Unlike those employed in Early Years work there is currently no requirement for Teaching Assistants to hold a qualification such as the Fd. The Fd students tend to be those who 'want' to improve their academic qualifications and progress further whilst others are happy to get Fd and remain a Teaching Assistant. 50% approximately do go on to do the BA Top up in order to obtain teacher status qualifications, a few get teacher placements on the Registered Teacher or Graduate Teacher Programmes, and one or two go on long term to do the PGCE qualification.

Few students receive employer support with the funding of the course fees, most are female (out of 200 students around 5 are male) part time employees and are not generally allowed any hours within work time to attend the course. A few of the Teaching Assistants are Volunteer staff. A small number are allowed time off to complete assignments and dissertations but this is not common practice. **Most are taught via twilight/evening classes in the Colleges with a very small number attending afternoon courses.**

The Business Department does not get directly involved with the study support arrangements provided by the support services within the Colleges but the **Fd itself has been designed to include Study Skills within its first core module.** The Education Practitioner and Study Skills module includes; **Reflective Writing; Time management; Developing your Oral Presentation Skills; Taking Notes; Identifying Features of Academic Writing; Developing the Skills of Critical Thinking and Creating Your Bibliography/List of References.**

Initially the focus needs to be on **confidence building with students**, to help them gain the confidence that they can write at the level required. The Senior Lecturer is also involved in the initial inductions with students in the Colleges and visits the students during the year too. He introduces the dissertation to them in their third year. In order to standardise assignments and moderation arrangements the College staff all attend pre assignment meetings at the University.

The Colleges all carry out dyslexia screening and literacy and numeracy tests as students must have at least level III literacy to be accepted on the course. The Colleges give the students the option to take up additional skills training if necessary to reach this level. The Senior Lecturer met with the Central Study Support Co-ordinator of the University in the summer regarding arrangements to inform 07/08 year students and college staff about study support and library resources available to students from the University but has then left these arrangements to the central team. Whilst the **students can access the library and Study Support facilities of the University** he isn't sure that they do due to the location issue- although access can be made via on line methods. As yet he has not received any reports in respect of the 07/08 year students on whether or not they have accessed study support from the Central University Support team.

Most of the students have qualifications via the NVQ route, a few via the Diploma in childcare education which is equivalent to 2 'A' levels and many are mature learners. Whilst the enrolment criteria require the students to be working in schools as a Teaching Assistant there is currently no set entrance qualifications. The University however is planning to introduce a requirement that 'students at some point during the Fd course must obtain the equivalent of GCSE grade 5 in literacy, if not already held'. This is not due to any particular issue with student performance on the course but it is felt that when helping school pupils with literacy the Teaching Assistants ought to have qualifications in this.

The courses have had about a 20% drop out rate, mainly due to issues such as changing jobs, a lack of funding, pregnancy and for a small number even with support the course was too much for them. Of the remaining students there has been around a 90% success rate.

Stoke on Trent College

The College offers a range of HE programmes- HND, HNC and Foundation Degree (Fd) courses which have a practical focus. The College provides its HE programmes as a member of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation consortium. Access and preparation to HE courses are also offered, including a '**Get Ready for H.E**' course which is delivered using a range of teaching methods including short lectures, discussion, group work and research based activities. The course includes an hour personal tutorial each week. It aims to enhance students' study skills such as research, presentation and referencing; improve their written skills, critical analysis, and reflective thinking.

The College's **HE Co-ordinator** indicated that most of the HE students were on average around 20-30 years and out of education for a while. A mix of qualifications is held by them but most generally have level 3 qualifications via the NVQ or BTEC routes, probably around 90%. Around 400 courses are 'part-time' in the evening, with some 'full time' in the day, most of the Fd students are employed and studying part time. If studying full time the students are usually on campus three days a week with part time students usually in on one day. The employers are supportive but if there is an issue at work, some students are 'on call', and work has to come first. The College is prepared for this and flexible. Retention and achievement levels are good.

In the HE co-ordinator's experience when delivering engineering courses it is the **report writing skill that has to be re-learned**. Although there is a College Central Support team for main FE students the HE students generally are supported in this ongoing during their course by their course tutors, with additional specific sessions arranged as necessary during **study weeks**. The **central support can sometimes be too generic, Engineering report writing for example is different to Social Care and so such support is focused within a Faculty**. The **Tutors are all practitioners** and aware of the employer's and actual job requirements so all **study support can be explained by relating it to the subject studied**. The Fds all have the **study skills/personal development units in the first module**. There is an **open door policy for students to see tutors**. The average size of a class in College is 20, whereas it could be up to 60 in a university and so accessing the course tutor is much easier. This relatively straightforward approach to accessing tutors allows for a much more personal relationship which makes it more likely for the student to ask for help if needed.

Many of their HE students have either studied at the college in the past or just completed FE courses there so are familiar with the College and prefer to study at HE level there even though the University is only down the road. This parochialism for some dictates the type of course they will enrol on. The HE students are made aware of the University facilities and support available at the campus and also on

the University VLE- Blackboard but few accesses any. A suggestion that maybe the 'offer' arrangements could be formalised to invite them to the University two or three times a year which would improve their take up of the University facilities and support.

Tutors are offered development days by the University Faculty which they are linked with to keep abreast of the course components, assignment standards and identify if there are areas which students need additional support with-whether provided by the University or the College.

Telford College of Arts & Technology

The College currently delivers five Foundation degrees (Fds) in conjunction with Wolverhampton University, with three more planned. Most Fd students are part time and are taught at the College, although some continue their second year at Wolverhampton University. Retention rate on HE courses is good. Teacher Training Courses are also delivered in conjunction with Wolverhampton University. There are also links with the University of Worcester and Staffordshire University for some courses. The HE section of the web site quotes the College as having 'A reputation for high quality teaching; Relatively small class sizes; Tutor personal contact and guidance not always found in large institutions'.

The HE Co-ordinator feels that it is noticeable that **students with 'A' levels do handle the academic side of the courses better than those who don't have an academic qualification.** Those with vocational qualifications such as a **BTEC have some of the skills required but ones with NVQs do not.** There also appears **a difference between part time and full time students with regard to the support required,** with part time students more likely to need additional support. Courses that require an **interview before enrolment** allow for information to be obtained about the work experience and qualification route which will identify if there may be an early need to provide additional help with study skills. If necessary however, some are advised to enrol on a **one year Access course** beforehand to gain the academic skills or additional qualifications required to successfully achieve on their planned degree course. **Students vary in why they want to do the courses and this can make a difference to the support needed.** Some are on the Fds because their sector require them to have the qualification, such as the Early Years and Childcare courses where-as others are on the courses for careers progression purposes or purely social reasons to return to education. A number of the College's FE students progress onto their HE courses, particularly the Health and Computing courses. The College is also planning to run the LLN's **Skills for HE module** designed for vocational learners' transition.

Information on the type of support and where it is available is provided during **induction** to the course. **University welcome packs** are also issued during these induction sessions. The College has dedicated HE social areas and computers for HE students. New build is planned though which will provide **a dedicated HE 'floor' with student common room and teaching areas.**

The **Fds do include study skills in their assignment briefs** and the lecturers address these with students in lectures. **Study skills support is provided via the Vocational Skills Co-ordinator** and as considerable emphasis is placed upon these skills he has **a weekly slot with them during the first semester**. Ideally they would like study skills to be the first module and on its own but the timetable does not allow it. One to one tutorials with students also help students to focus on the assignments.

There is a **mix of teaching staff** on the courses- **some HE and some FE**. Each College tutor has excellent links and support with the appropriate School in the University to help them deliver the Fd course and support the students effectively. The HE Co-ordinator feels that there is more one to one support available for students in college than at university. At TCAT there are smaller group sizes which make it possible to have more informal tutorial support. All student support is provided at the College and although all can access the University's Virtual Learning environment –WOLF for information most do not, but instead use the College's library and intranet for all information and on line resources. The students also have College and University email addresses, but not many other than the computing tutors and students access their emails. The HE Co-ordinator corresponds with the HE students mainly via letter. The students whose third year of a course is delivered at the University will at that point use the University's VLE and access all of the support and library facilities available on campus.

University of Wolverhampton

The University has four main campuses with around 18,000 students studying at them with about 41% studying part time. Two in Wolverhampton, one in Walsall and one in Telford. The School of Health also run courses at Burton.

The Assistant Director of **Learning and Information Services** at the University of Wolverhampton has **recently undertaken a review of the study support services** provided to students and the recommendations were considered by the University Quality Enhancement Committee and the Academic Board. Key points raised highlight the need for easily accessible, equitable provision which could be provided by centrally supported 'off the shelf' resources with study support embedded further into all of the Schools and campuses of the University. The intention is to have **a recognised Study Skills Support management framework** that will allow for accessible quality generic study support information which is fully used, whether accessed via the website or face to face support and for study support skills to become even more embedded within all Schools across the University with key staff responsible for its implementation and all following the framework of **Learning and Information Services** at the University of Wolverhampton. The total adoption of this will also rely on funding sources being made available from such sources as the Teaching and Learning funds.

Learning and Support Services are very driven by student demand and already a vast amount of **information, tip sheets and interactive resources** to support the students with their studying is

provided on the University's **web site**. The following information is extracted from one of the Study Support pages on the website and indicates the type of support on offer- all headings have links to further pages of information and materials.

Website entry (<http://www.wlv.ac.uk/Default.aspx?page=6998>)

...'**Study support**

We are eager to help all our students, whatever their background - and our **Sharpen Up Your Skills** web pages at www.wlv.ac.uk/skills put you in touch with all the resources listed below.

- **Sharpen Up Your Skills**
- **Helping you learn - academic skills**
- **Writing and assignment skills**
- **Exam techniques**
- **Enhancing your study - professional skills**
- **PDP and opportunities**
- **Life skills**
- **Making choices for your future**
- **Study support for all - international, part-time, mature, postgraduate students: What's on:** a full timetable of workshops, student development opportunities, useful resources and contact details

The University also offers

- **Study skills advisors** across our four campus Learning Centres offer advice on topics such as essay writing techniques, report writing and taking lecture notes
- **Online study skills tipsheets** - guides to utilising lectures, effective group work, time management and stages of assignment research, planning, writing and presentation [available online and also in hard copy in the Centres]
- **Study skills books** - advice on finding books in **Learning Centres** on all different aspects of study skills
- **IT help for current students** - featuring self-help guides which include basic IT skills for beginners and advice on using Office software such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Outlook
- **Study skills module** that helps you build personal and study skills, including research and analysis, note taking and information technology. Successful completion could count towards your final degree or diploma
- **Learning for Success** module that helps you think about the way you learn and how to improve your learning ability. Successful completion could count towards your final degree or diploma

Information Skills & InfoBites

- **Information Skills**

Information skills are skills that help you to develop effective strategies for locating information, understand different information sources in a variety of media, navigate the Internet, evaluate material, and correctly present and reference your information sources. These skills are often described by the term “**information literacy**”.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) define Information Literacy as “knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner”. The full definition together with more information and useful links can be found here.

Learning and Information Services (LIS) are dedicated to supporting students and staff to develop information literacy skills. This can range from basic inductions and general information skills workshops to bespoke sessions that are tailored for particular groups.

InfoBites

InfoBites are **information skills workshops** at Learning Centres covering topics such as finding print and electronic resources, searching the Web, literature searching and research skills, staying up-to-date in your subject area, Harvard referencing, APA referencing, and using EndNote. For more information about InfoBites, please ask at any Learning Centre or email learningcentredirect@wlv.ac.uk.

InfoBites also has a WOLF topic which is kept up-to-date with details of InfoBites workshops as well as containing all presentations and worksheets relating to the sessions [The University's web based Virtual Learning Environment (**VLE**) is called WOLF (Wolverhampton Online Learning Framework)] .

You can use the WOLF topic to view InfoBites presentations you may have attended, or you can use it as a stand alone help tool if you would like to develop your information skills but are unable to attend the InfoBites sessions in person'....

Over the last two years a **more systematic approach has been adopted when referring students for support** from the generic centralised study skills support team. Whilst there was a system in place before it was not so uniform in its application. Study Skills Advisers have been based in the main Centre in Wolverhampton for around five years with Study Skills Advisers now available in every campus Learning Centre wherever located- other than Burton, which has an Adviser attached to and funded via the School of Health. General maths skills support is not provided centrally by Advisers but in the School of Health the Study Skills Advisers do provide maths skills support in order to support

the students with the drugs element of their course and the School of Computing and IT also provide their students with similar intensive support.

Approximately 40% of students using central Study Skills support last year were international students and they are given tests to check their level of English before being accepted onto the courses. Whilst support with English grammar is provided centrally by Study Skills Advisers, they will not proof read papers for the students but will show them how to do this for themselves. Students are helped with referencing skills by Study Advisers and also Learning Centre staff in the centres.

An area which is being looked at closely by staff and which **all students appear to increasingly need support with from Study Skills Advisers is 'understanding academic feedback'**. A lack of improvement in some students' marks seems to indicate they are not able to interpret the comments made which are intended specifically to help them improve.

Learning Centres are based in Telford, Walsall, Compton Park and the main City Centre campuses. Advisers are usually available during 3 hour blocks- 10am-1 pm and 1pm until 4pm, during which students can book half hour sessions in advance. The University has also been offering one hour study skills advice slots for those students that want them this year and will be reviewing the take up and usefulness of this. The perception is that already the introduction of the booking system has helped to improve the access to the study support and 'turn-aways' have been greatly reduced. Around 90% use of support is via bookings, whilst before it was 50% bookings and 50% drop in.

The take up of study skills support at the beginning of term and semester two is usually not high. By reducing the availability at the beginning of term LIS are able to make more Adviser support available later. This **phased approach** is helping to ensure a better take up and more efficient use of the available support. Many part time learners are only in university one day a week and if the Centres only have limited study skills support booking sessions they miss out on the centrally provided support. **Evening and week end slots** have now also been made available which particularly helps to address the needs of these **part time students**, who in many instances are also the vocational learners. Study skills sessions are also provided during **vacations** to help students- particularly those that are re-sitting exams. Learning Centres have extended hours of opening to allow students to use the facilities including until midnight in main centres, Monday to Thursday and also until 9pm on Sundays at 2 Centres. The University has a high student population from **Widening Participation backgrounds** with no family tradition of going to university, including locally based students who may have only limited access at home to computer facilities. These students may not always have the study skills expected by the courses regardless of whether they are 'A' level students or vocational qualification students and so easy access for them on a regular basis to support and facilities is aimed for.

Timing of the provision of study skills support is regarded as key and, when embedding such activity into the various Schools and courses, effective back up arrangements must be put in place in order to address all individual learning styles and requirements. As an example, there has been around an 80% take up by Business Studies students in the Compton Park Centre since the improved referral process was introduced and '**word has spread**' about the excellent central generic study support provided by the Study Skills Advisers. This doubled the previous recorded take up. Students who have specific learning difficulties, medical conditions or may require additional specific support are referred to fully qualified Counsellors or staff in the **Student Enabling Centre**. Study Skills Advisers are trained on this referral process. Study Skills Advisers are also aware that students can become over dependent and if too many repeat visits are made the student records are 'flagged up' and appropriate action taken to help the student become more self confident in their work or identify if there is another issue that requires additional specific help.

Centrally based Study Skills Advisers provide one to one support and are all post graduate students who are fully appreciative of the issues and skill requirements for students when studying. Many are studying for PhDs and usually remain as Advisers for two to three years. Nine were interviewed at the beginning of this academic year, three immediately taken on with six more placed in the 'pool' ready for involvement during the busy times for provision of study support. The centrally based generic Study Skills Advisers were previously well 'used' by students from the Schools of Humanities and Health, less so now though as they now employ their own Advisers. The Schools of Education and Sports, Performing Arts & Leisure now also employ their own Advisers. Some **School's Advisers also provide group study support sessions**. There has however been a bigger take up centrally by students from other Schools, including Engineering and the Built Environment which does cater for many part time and vocational students.

S2S is the University's **mentoring and peer support system** that aims to help students 'find their feet' during their first year at university, involving current students who are eager to share their own experiences with new students, and help them to get the best out of being there. Mentoring takes place in some Schools and there is a 'scatter gun' approach to ensure support is provided.

The University also offers an online '**chat**' service for students. This is called ASSIST and is a **virtual reference service which enables students to 'chat' online to a librarian**. This offers procedural advice rather than skills based advice. Students from other universities also make use of this service.

The Assistant Director of Learning and Information Services also finds the Staffordshire University's Assignment Survival Kit (**ASK**) as a useful tool for students to access when planning assignments.

Study Skills Advisers attend internal staff training events to promote the support that can be made available to students. Promotion of induction activities and issue of materials to lecturers does vary

from School to School. LIS **Key Fact sheets** with details of all types of support, contact information etc that can be carried around easily in small plastic ID wallets attached to keys/security tags are issued to students at all induction and welcome events.

Through the University's Blended Learning Strategy a number of Schools are encouraging students to complete **e-portfolios** and use these with their **Personal Tutors** to help identify the type of support they might require. Long term it is hoped that this support process will be embedded within all Schools. It is recognised that lecturers and tutors are key to students understanding the relevance of any available support and actively accessing it. A new **development this year has been the introduction of an 'internal' staff study skills support page** on the website that all Personal Tutors can easily access to use with students. This will be reviewed to see if it has resulted in Personal Tutors themselves providing additional study skills support or if increased referrals have been made to centrally located Study Skills Advisers.

Registered students are entitled to access support **wherever they are and whether full or part time**. Foundation Degree students particularly need **flexible access** and the long term goal is that WOLF (the VLE) will help provide this along with access to extended vacation and Saturday morning study support sessions. The development of an **online booking system** for the central based Study Skills Advisers is being investigated which should allow for basic information to be submitted by the student before hand to the Adviser so that the actual session can be planned better and time with the student used fully to help address issues and not be taken up by administration.

The University is involved in a number of **Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)** initiatives, including **Critical Interventions for Enhanced Learning (CIEL)**. This CETL is based on the first-year student experience and is multi-disciplinary. It identifies excellent practice in four areas: Art & Design; Applied Sciences; Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences and Education. These practices comprise critical interventions for the enhancement of retention, achievement and progression. CIEL identifies pedagogies, support systems, activities and initiatives that in some way offer critical interventions that help a student along this journey towards successfully achieving their goals. The critical interventions include: **Critical Moments; Tracking and Monitoring; Academic Literacies; Embedded Study Skills; Personal Tutoring; Personal Development Planning (PDP); Volunteering and Student 2 Student Mentoring.**

Within the Embedded Study Skills element, the CETL team examined the impact of a module - called **Learning for Success**, which was a study skills module that all first year students in the School of Education took. The module set out core learning outcomes and activities that were then 'owned' and taught by subject specialists and was seen by students as a subject specific module. The materials and all information related to the module were delivered through the virtual learning environment with subjects tailoring such things as "sources of information" to their own specific requirements. This

module had been running for 12 years. They found that mature students (about a quarter of the cohort – at that time around 200 students per year) found it beneficial. The other students, who had come straight from college or school, felt that they could write in an academic fashion and read appropriate academic journals and literature. This view was backed up by results from a questionnaire, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. What they did feel they wanted was **critical thinking skills**. In 2007 when they went for revalidation of the 3 programmes in this school, every module had some study skills embedded in the curriculum and so Learning for Success no longer exists as a stand alone module in the School of Education but the ethos and experience that it has generated is now fully embedded. The Assistant Director of the CETL is Project manager for the University **Strategic Project 2007-12: Reviewing and rethinking the First Year Experience**.

5. Feedback from Students

Few feedback questionnaire forms have been returned by students and so analysis is quite limited. Replies were received from 11 students based within 3 institutions. These 11 students were made up of: 10 full time students and one part time; two 1st year; six 2nd year; two 3rd year and one 4th year students. Qualifications they hold already include: six with BTEC National Diplomas; one with NVQs and also attended an Access Course; one who attended an Access course; one with 'A' levels; one with a Foundation Diploma and one with a National Diploma plus 'A' levels. The type of support accessed by the students who have replied is indicated in Table 1, plus information on how the support was promoted to them.

Seven of the students commented that: the study skills support was 'helpful'; 'helpful-useful'; 'it was exactly what was wanted-helpful and useful and is improving my writing skills and assignment work'; 'it was a great help with assignments and managing time and 'very helpful'.

Table 1

| Type of Academic study skills support provided | Aware and accessed it | How | Where | By whom | How often |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| Don't know! | 3 | | | | |
| Support with assignment guidelines | 1 | In class | College | Tutor | Each project |
| | 1 | Learner Support one to one | Central Support Centre and Tutors offices | Learning Support Tutors | Booking 1 hour slots |
| | 1 | | | | Weekly Ongoing- weekly – booked as required etc |
| | 4 | Tutorials One to one | Class Central Support Centre | Tutor Learning Support Tutor | Workshops at lunch times throughout the year |
| 1 | Workshops- | Central | Learning | Each term | |

| Type of Academic study skills support provided | Aware and accessed it | How | Where | By whom | How often |
|---|-------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| | | one to ones leaflets and handouts | Support Centre | Support Staff | As and when |
| Time management | 1 1 5 | In class Tutorials One to One and workshops | College Class Central Support Centre | Tutor Tutor Learning Support | Tutorials As needed Ongoing- Termly sessions |
| Presentation Skills | 1 1 7 | Via Tutor weekly sessions In class Tutorials/ one to one reviews One to ones | College College Class Central Support Centre | Via Tutor Tutor Tutor Learning Support | Ongoing-weekly Tutorials As needed Ongoing by booking |
| Referencing | 1 1 6 | Art history class Tutorials/ one to one reviews One to one and workshops | Lecture theatre Class Central Support Centre | Tutor Tutor | Once so far As needed Weekly -as booked- twice a term |
| Accessing Library Resources/ online journals | 1 1 2 3 1 | Induction week Tutorials & Moodle on line Library staff- Tutors and Tutor Groups (small groups) Using Guided print- outs Help Desk In Library 2 sessions | College and University induction On line/Class Library Library and Central Support Centre Computer Room | Tutorials Tutors Staff Library Staff and Library Support Guides produced by Staff Library staff | Start of year Each project Beginning of Year- induction and as required On demand as and when required 1 session in 1 st year and 1 session in 2 nd year |
| Maths | 6 | One to one and groups | Central Support Centre | Maths Learning support Tutor and Learning Support | By Booking Once per week At certain times of year to link into modules Small groups- |
| English | 4 | One to one Learning support APD module | Central Support Centre | Learning Support | By Booking 1 hr sessions |
| Revision and Study techniques | 1 5 | Study Skills Tutorials One to one and workshops | Class Central Support Centre | Tutor Learning Support | As needed By Booking as required-weekly etc Two per term Lunchtime sessions |

| Type of Academic study skills support provided | Aware and accessed it | How | Where | By whom | How often |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------|--|
| Other? Essay writing Structuring reports | 1 3 | One to one and workshops | Central Support Centre | Learning Support | By Booking Termly workshops – 2-3-lunchtimes |

| Informed about Specific Academic Study Skills support through: | Number who replied |
|--|--------------------|
| Prospectus | 7 |
| Welcome Pack | 3 |
| Induction week activities | 8 |
| Leaflets | 5 |
| Notice boards (located where?) | 3 |
| Web site sections | 2 |
| Webs site Q & As | 2 |
| Emails | 2 |
| Peer mentors | 4 |
| Lecturers | 6 |
| Tutors | 8 |
| Student union | 1 |
| Other methods Course handbook and course website | 2 |

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