



Learning Support: Forward Planning in the New Funding Climate

A Case Study in collaboration with the Learning Support Manager and the Learning Support Coordinator from Guildford College



Guildford College



Background:

Founded in 1908 as Guildford Technical College, the college grew and evolved to become Guildford College of Further and Higher Education. In 2003 Guildford College merged with Merrist Wood, a local land-based College, and in 2007 there was another merger with Farnham Sixth Form College. The College encompasses courses from Entry Level to HE.

The Learning Support department at Guildford College provide an example of best practice in the effective management and deployment of learning support both across the organisation and in the class room. This good practice and attention to detail starts long before the students arrive at the college, as this case study illustrates.

Midas Systems' involvement with Guildford College began in 2010 when the previous Learning Support Manager was preparing to move on. He made a parting recommendation that the Learning Support Department use our Learning Support systems for the 'efficiency, effective use of data and good management' they would bring to the table.

Our involvement with the new Learning Support Manager began in 2011, first with implementation of **SpirALS** and the following year with **TEAM**, our Tutor Support Module.

Since then, we have forged strong working relationships with the LS Manager and the LS Coordinator, who have taken full advantage of our support, training and seminars.

"The College have really valued the support provided by Midas Systems, and have utilised both ad hoc telephone support (regularly) and, to a lesser extent, scheduled training courses."

They were one of the first colleges to pilot, and subsequently use, the **Learner Support** section in **SpirALS**, which we are trialling with a view to incorporating in a brand new system due to be released for pilot in 14/15.

'Students' additional learning needs are effectively diagnosed and additional support is good. Support for vulnerable students and those with disabilities is good'-Ofsted 2011

Pre Entry: 'Building up the Picture'

The learning support team take enormous care to build up a picture of prospective students' support requirements, gathering information from schools, SENCOs, students' interviews and Local Authority Moving on Plans. Guildford College has developed effective and holistic communication with all involved in assembling and assessing the possible support of prospective learners. Often learners are invited into the college to experience the respective faculties and at this stage the 'Lead LS Tutors' have an opportunity to further understand learners' needs and suitability for intended study routes; a very rigorous process that enables the best support to be targeted and forward planning to commence.

They developed their initial assessment forms from our **SpirALS** 'Data Collection Forms' model. The LS Coordinator then creates and utilises a 'Pre-Entry' data-file in **SpirALS**. Having the HNS student information in **SpirALS** enables her to quickly and efficiently gather together the information required for the Local Authorities.

"The ease of having the information in the SpirALS format enables quick and accurate processing of Schedule 2s".

The LS Manager currently deals with five Local Authorities and, like so many, has to wrestle with the variances in format, terminology and detail of LA requests. (**Midas Systems** have recently produced a High Needs Student Agreement which is a **SpirALS** report based on the EFA's recommended model form. The aim is to make life much easier by encouraging all LA's to accept the report, which can be printed from **SpirALS** complete with **SpirALS** data).

She then creates a 'skeleton' estimate for each learner, listing all the elements of support she expects to provide.

*"These estimates can then be exported into a spreadsheet which shows us how much we plan to spend on each of our high need learners. The LS Co-ordinator exports this from the **SpirALS** 'Browse/Filter students Report', puts it into Excel then manipulates it to show estimates for each student by their authority."*

Forward Planning with the Tutor's: A Team Effort

ALS Tutors' involvement and input in support planning at Guildford College is essential and embedded. The college ALS structure is divided into **Lead Tutors, Specialist Tutors** and **LSAs**. The highly qualified Lead Tutors act as coordinators for learners' support in each curriculum area. Their expertise encompasses the full range of specialities for disability, learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. Professional development is targeted, rigorous and on-going. **Lead Tutors** provide support to curriculum staff with understanding and management of the various support needs of the learners. This might be in the form of general CPD, or targeted to a particular team that has a student with Asperger's, or a profoundly deaf student, coming into their area. They might also give an outline of strategies that they believe will work for that learner.

Recording and Tracking: 'A Student's Journey from Pre-entry to Achievement'

The rigorous and detailed early preparation forms the foundation for what follows and the same best practice standards are consistent throughout the student's support journey.

A similar process is used for monitoring and recording support to adults and young people who are not high need. For this group the EFA do not require financial estimates, but the learning support team still use a variant of the assessment agreement so that they can show why the learner is having support, and what support needs to be put in place. Recording detail for ALL learning, regardless of cost, is vital for planning and managing resources and budgets, measuring effectiveness and impact, and for providing evidence of support for Ofsted.

SpirALS data is used when the team are asked, for example, who is having support from a particular curriculum area, or how many learners from different funding categories are accessing support. Powerful SpirALS features such as the 'Filter Manager' and 'Query Export Manager' make it simple to produce reports to meet virtually any purpose using any criteria.

The LS Manager found SpirALS invaluable to negotiate the bursary for 24+ Loans students. She filtered for the previous year's 24+ support information and used this as a basis for negotiation, achieving the full amount requested!

The **Specialist Tutors** and Lead Tutors deliver support in-class, 1:1 and also to small groups and drop-in workshops. They use the **TEAM** module to record targets, log reviews and attendance. One Specialist Tutor described the **TEAM** system as 'easy to use' and getting into the habit of recording their notes straight after a support session was the best way to ensure meaningful and accurate support session information.

The LS Coordinator coordinates the TEAM information in SpirALS. She uses the TEAM Validator to give herself and the LS Manager a real time picture of support attendance and the learner's progress.

The LS Manager needs to track and forecast half termly to check the actual HNS support costs compared to original estimated figures, up or down – partly to ensure that the estimates were accurate, and if they weren't, to see why not, and partly for financial reasons so that the Director can ensure that the budget is where it should be. Midas Systems are currently working to create a report that will make this forecast checking flexible and easy.

The LS Manager admits that she finds our systems incredibly useful and our support excellent, yet *"we only touch 50% of the possibilities SpirALS offers"* - and she intends to explore our **SpirALS** Budget Manager and Forecasting facilities in the future.

"Whilst we have other College software systems for budget management, managing HR, etc, anything that makes our life easier and allows us to manage the new high needs process effectively is very welcome."

Forward planning, an ethos that values the Learning Support workforce, effective CPD, good communication, holistic working relationships and our qualitative information management systems ensure consistent best practice standards throughout the learner's support journey at Guildford College.