

Guidance for ELSA supervisors

Frequency of supervision

It is recommended that group supervision be offered every half term, led by an Educational Psychologist. Each session should be 2 hours in duration. It is advisable to plan in a little flexibility in case any ELSA needs to talk privately following a session, although this is not a common occurrence.

Content of supervision

Educational psychologists will have their own style of leading supervision, and may vary their approaches.

Some key elements would be:

- checking how people are (which is more than a quick greeting; it allows ELSAs to share any personal difficulties that may potentially impact on the work they are able to do for a period of time)
- finding out what ELSAs want from the session that day
- negotiating the management of the available time
- shared discussion of issues arising from casework
- ensuring that 'air time' is available fairly and not dominated repeatedly by any group member

ELSAs may want to show or share resources with others in the group.

If an Educational Psychologist experiences any difficulty in the course of supervision, they may either note it and take it to their next team meeting, or discuss it individually with their team leader or another colleague.

Monitoring attendance

It is essential to keep a register of supervision attendance. This allows regularity of each ELSA's attendance to be monitored. ELSAs should be asked to send apologies if they miss a session. If an ELSA is missing supervision from time to time other than for reason of illness, this should be followed up to identify any problem. It is suggested that the ELSA be contacted by letter or email, copying in the SENCo or Head Teacher. Remind the ELSA that it is a requirement to access regular supervision for his/her own safety and for the safety of the pupils with whom they work. An ELSA's line manager may sometimes need to be reminded about the importance of releasing the ELSA for supervision.

Awarding certificates

Because the ELSA role requires more than attendance of an initial training course, it is recommended that certificates are not awarded until after a period of practice as an ELSA. Before receiving a certificate an ELSA should ideally be required to:

- have attended all five initial training days (sometimes one is missed and needs to be made up subsequently with a different cohort)
- have attended a minimum of four group supervision sessions
- have shown some examples of their programme and session planning to their supervising Educational Psychologist.

Programme and session planning

The checking of plans is not intended as an inspectorial role for supervisors. It is to ascertain whether the ELSA needs any further support with identifying clear and

realistic targets for a programme of intervention and appropriate session objectives. The Educational Psychologist would be able to offer improvement suggestions as appropriate to help an ELSA develop their practice.

While it may be appropriate from time to time for an ELSA to deviate from a session plan in order to respond to a current emotional need, it is not appropriate for an ELSA to deliver support without plans. This would be reactive rather than proactive support. The exception to this is when a programme has been completed and the pupil is receiving more informal maintenance support to establish the new skills learned. This follow-up support would normally be either less frequent or involve briefer contact sessions. Without clear programme aims an ELSA will not know when to end a programme. Programmes should have discreet aims. These need to be SMART (small, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-limited) targets. Session objectives may relate either to what the ELSA does or what the pupil does. Further details are included in a separate Programme and Session Planning Guidelines document.

Record keeping

The completed planning documents form a record of an ELSA's involvement with a pupil. These provide accountability to line management in school, and are also useful prompts when liaising with parents or other staff about work with the pupil. These are open documents, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore should be factual and written in a way that will not be offensive to either the pupil or parents. Once a programme has been completed these should be added to the pupil's other school records. If a pupil moves school, the ELSA records should be passed on with together with other pupil records. It will then be apparent what support the pupil has previously received.

Some ELSAs have wished to keep some working notes that are completely confidential, which may have included information the pupil has divulged that the ELSA does not want to forget. They may also have included working hypotheses about the pupil's needs. *ELSA's should be advised not to do this* as legal advice is that any such notes could be requisitioned under a Freedom of Information request by a parent. Courts have the power to require them to be released, even if an ELSA or head teacher thinks it is not in the best interests of a child. We therefore need to advise ELSAs to write minimal notes only, knowing that they could be read by others. Sensitive information should not be written down, or should be recorded in a neutral way e.g. 'we discussed relationship with mother' as a memory prompt.

Confidentiality

ELSA's are not counsellors and are not therefore required to follow the same strict guidelines on confidentiality expected of counsellors and psychotherapists. The key principle is respect for the pupil's privacy. ELSA's would be expected to share information in a respectful way on a need to know basis. Intimate details about a pupil's home life can be kept private (subject of course to the usual child protection guidelines) but it may be very helpful to share some information in a more general way. For example, it may be important for another member of staff to know that a child is having a difficult time at home because of some disharmony within the family, but they would not usually need to know detailed information about parental arguments.

In order to preserve the confidence of pupils, ELSAs should be encouraged to ask pupil permission before passing on information that the pupil may believe they have shared in confidence. This is not only respectful but is likely to increase pupil trust.

Information discussed in supervision is of course confidential within the group. It is important that this is overtly acknowledged by the group, as a pupil or family may be known to others. EPs should be careful to model and encourage respectful communication by ELSAs when discussing pupils, and use of first names only should be used. Indeed there have been occasions when a pupil has unknowingly been related to another ELSA within the group, or known by them in a social context, causing that ELSA some discomfort or embarrassment.