

Feedback on Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) supervision



Hampshire
County Council

The Research & Evaluation Unit conducted this evaluation on behalf of the local authority. The original data are available should anyone wish to check, question or challenge the information reported. Any opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Hampshire's Children's Services Department.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently, 630 school staff are trained as ELSAs and a further 65 received training during the 2011/12 academic year. Following the initial period of training, all ELSAs are offered group supervision on a half-termly basis, led by a designated Educational Psychologist. The aim of the present evaluation was to examine ELSAs' views on supervision by seeking feedback from all ELSAs within the Local Authority, including those who had just completed their training. Additionally, the views of the 46 Educational Psychologists who provide ELSA supervision were sought, both in terms of the nature of the supervision provided to ELSAs, and their own supervision needs.

Questionnaires were received from 24 ELSA supervisors, a response rate of 52%. These indicated that most supervision sessions followed a similar pattern, generally comprising of a welcome/check-in activity, updates on any business issues, identification of issues for discussion, problem solving of identified issues, resource sharing and a review of the session. Some sessions also included discussion of a 'high interest' topic, normally identified during the previous session. Examples of such topics included loss and bereavement, supporting children with parents in prison, friendship skills and attachment.

There was some variation in the frequency with which supervisors received supervision in relation to their work with ELSAs; this ranged from once or twice a year to every half-term. In spite of this variation, 87% were happy with the amount of supervision they received. All stated that they also sought support from other ELSAs where needed, and 96% stated that they felt they received enough support for their role as ELSA supervisor.

Questionnaires were received from 32 trainee ELSAs, a response rate of 49%. Seventy five per cent reported that they had received information on supervision during their training (not all had completed their training at this point). It was anticipated that supervision would be very important once they began work as an ELSA (mean rating of importance = 4.78 out of 5), with the majority hoping to gain support, advice and ideas, confidence in their approach, and a chance to share any worries. The majority had no concerns in relation to supervision, although a small number were worried about being able to take time out of school in order to attend sessions.

Questionnaires were received from 270 ELSAs, a response rate of 43%. Overall, attitudes towards supervision were positive. Nearly all the ELSAs felt that they were offered the right number of supervision sessions (95%), that the sessions lasted for the right length of time (95%) and that the size of their group was about right (93%). Most reported that they looked to supervision for advice, problem solving and new ideas, as well as support. A distinction was made between practical support, in the form of sharing resources, receiving training and gaining updates on guidelines, and emotional support in the form of gaining reassurance and confidence and being given the opportunity to offload any concerns.

Encouragingly, 89% of ELSAs felt that their supervision needs were being met. The views of the remainder were mixed. Whilst some were keen for greater input from their supervisor, others were keen for more discussion time. Others requested a change in the structure of their group or made requests for specific changes to the content of the sessions.

ELSAs were asked to rate the extent to which their supervisor i) enabled them to become actively involved in supervision sessions, ii) helped them to feel at ease with the supervision process, iii) checked with them that they were getting what they wanted from the sessions, iv) encouraged them to consider new ways of working with children involved in ELSA, v) gave them new understanding about the thoughts, feelings and actions of children involved in ELSA, vi) helped them to clarify objectives in working with children involved in ELSA and vii) helped them to manage their workload. These are areas which have been identified within the literature as being key to supervision. With the exception of 'help you to manage your workload', which received a slightly lower rating, each area received a mean rating of 4.20 or more out of 5, indicating that respondents found their supervisor to be a useful source of support in a variety of areas.

In order to ensure that responses were not limited to those previously identified by the literature, respondents were also asked to suggest any other ways in which their supervisor helped them. The most common response was that their supervisor was easily contactable if the ELSA needed advice outside of supervision, and was always ready to listen and respond to the ELSA and the other members of the group. Emotional support was also highlighted, as well as practical help in the form of providing or suggesting resources, helping to plan a way forward, and providing information about training opportunities.

Overall, respondents rated their relationship with their supervisor as being very good (mean = 4.43 out of 5), with additional comments describing how their supervisor was approachable, friendly and easy to contact. Supervisors were perceived to be knowledgeable, supportive and understanding, and good listeners. All of these qualities were felt to strengthen the relationship ELSAs had with their supervisor. In a minority of cases, ELSAs felt that they did not have a very good relationship with their supervisor. Sometimes, this was because they had a new supervisor, and hence their relationship was still developing, or because they simply felt they did not know their supervisor very well at this point. A small number felt that their supervisor did not listen to them, was difficult to talk to or approach for guidance, or did not have sufficient knowledge.

Nearly half of the ELSAs knew their supervisor outside of supervision sessions, mainly through their work with the school, and occasionally as a trainer for a course the ELSA had been on. This was not seen to be problematic. Just over a quarter had contacted their supervisor for support outside of supervision; they were slightly more inclined to do this if they knew their supervisor outside of supervision.

Respondents also rated their relationship with other members of the group as very good (mean = 4.45 out of 5), with many describing the feeling of support they derived from co-members, and how friendly and at ease their group was. Some respondents got on better with some members than others. Several highlighted particularly dominating personalities who sometimes took over during meetings, whilst others noted that they knew some members, such as those who attended sessions regularly, better than others. Nearly half knew at least one of their group members outside of supervision, either in a work capacity or socially. On the whole, knowing group members outside of supervision was perceived to be non-problematic and, in many cases, was viewed positively.

In general, receiving supervision as a group was perceived to be advantageous, particularly in terms of facilitating exchange of ideas and resources and acting as a useful support network, providing individuals with a chance to offload, celebrate successes, and gain reassurance about their work. Group supervision was also perceived to be less daunting than one-to-one supervision, and therefore offered a more relaxed opportunity in which to gain support. It was also acknowledged that individual support was often still available, either immediately after a supervision session or by telephone or email in between sessions. One concern was that there was sometimes insufficient time to discuss all cases in enough detail in a group setting, particularly if individuals dominated proceedings. It was also acknowledged that it could be difficult to discuss personal or sensitive issues. A further concern was that not all issues discussed in the group were relevant to all the group members; it was acknowledged, though, that such discussions may well be useful in the future and, in any case, helped to prevent feelings of isolation.

Encouragingly, ELSA supervision was perceived to have had a positive impact on all the children in ELSAs' schools, and not just those receiving direct support from ELSA. Supervision was considered to provide ELSAs with skills that could be applied to all children. Moreover, the impact of the direct work carried out with certain children was felt to result in an overall calmer and happier school, with evident benefits for all children and staff. Supervision was also felt to afford ELSA greater 'status' such that the ELSA role was given greater recognition in school. Perhaps most importantly, ELSAs also felt that supervision had had a direct impact on their own personal and professional development and were able to provide specific examples of how their practice had changed as a result of supervision, and the impact this had had.

Overall then, views on supervision were very positive. A small minority of ELSAs expressed concerns about the quality of support they were receiving and these should not be discounted. However, the vast majority reported that their supervision needs were being met and that they had a good relationship with both their supervisor and other group members. This suggests that, in general, the supervision structure was felt to be working and was judged to be effective for most ELSAs. Such findings are encouraging and suggest that supervision is a highly valued aspect of ELSA work.

FEEDBACK ON EMOTIONAL LITERACY SUPPORT ASSISTANT (ELSA) SUPERVISION

1 BACKGROUND

At present, 630 school staff in this Local Authority are trained to fulfil the role of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA; see Burton, 2008, for further details) and a further 65 received training during the academic year 2011-12. Following their initial training, each ELSA is offered group supervision on a half-termly basis, led by a designated Educational Psychologist. Currently, ELSAs' views on the supervision they receive have not been examined. The aim of the current evaluation was to rectify this by seeking feedback from all ELSAs within the Local Authority, including those who had just completed their training.

The study was particularly interested in ELSAs' views on the quantity of supervision received (in terms of frequency and length of sessions), as well as the quality (in terms of the extent to which it meets their needs, and their relationships with various group members). Specific areas of interest were:

- What ELSAs (and trainee ELSAs) expect of supervision
- Whether these expectations were met
- What factors affect satisfaction with supervision
- Perceptions of the impact of supervision on ELSA practice

Additionally, the views of ELSA supervisors were sought. The questionnaires sent to supervisors included questions relating to the content of the supervision sessions they provided, in addition to their own supervision needs. Ultimately questionnaires were sent to 46 ELSA supervisors, 630 ELSAs currently working in schools and 65 trainee ELSAs who had received training during September 2011 and March 2012.

The report below presents the results of these questionnaires and divides into two main sections. Firstly it reports the views of the supervisors providing the supervision and secondly the views of ELSAs receiving supervision.

2 ELSA SUPERVISOR VIEWS

Questionnaires were received back from 24¹ ELSA supervisors, a response rate of 52%. This is a high response rate for an exercise of this type and suggests the views should be fairly representative of all ELSA supervisors. The following section includes detail on what supervisors perceive to be a typical supervision session, in order to set the context for the type of support provided to ELSAs. Subsequent sections relate to their familiarity with the content of the initial ELSA training, whether they seek feedback from ELSAs and their views on the support structures provided to them as supervisors.

¹ Of these, one supervisor only completed half the questionnaire; thus the latter questions are based on 23 responses.

Content of supervision sessions

As might be expected, sessions generally followed a similar pattern. Key features were as follows:

- **Welcome/check in.** Sessions usually started with an opening ‘check in’ activity to gain an overview of how each ELSA was and how the ELSA role was currently going for each member of the group. Such activities sometimes used creative resources (e.g. bear cards, strength cards, stones, shells, puppets, small world figures, postcards, buttons).
- **Admin/updates.** Following this, sessions usually involved some time spent updating the group on any business issues, for example, any members joining or leaving the group, dates and venues for the next meeting, information about training courses, and any updates from the last session.
- **Identification of issues for discussion** Next, time was usually spent creating an agenda by identifying particular issues to focus on. This was normally achieved by going round the group and asking each ELSA how their work was going and whether they had brought anything for supervision to discuss or to problem solve around.
- **Problem sharing on items for supervision.** The groups then tended to spend time problem solving the items as a whole, with the supervisor checking at the end of each item whether needs had been met before moving on to the next. Several respondents cited particular techniques that were used, such as “Gossiping in the presence of...”, solution circles and circle of adults.
- **Resource sharing.** Sessions often also involved an opportunity for sharing resources. In some cases ELSAs were invited to share interesting resources or materials they had come across or created themselves, whilst in other cases the ELSA supervisor brought along new resources to share with the group. Sometimes these resources linked to a particular topic that had been decided in advance. The timing of this varied. Sometimes it featured as part of the main session and sometimes it occurred during a break in the session.
- **Review.** Sessions generally concluded with discussion of celebrations and successes, a review of the session and sometimes planning for the next session.

Additionally, sessions often included discussion of a specific high interest topic, normally identified at the previous session. Sometimes this was a follow-up to issues previously raised during supervision. Examples of such topics included loss and bereavement, supporting children with parents in prison, friendship skills and attachment.

Familiarity with content of ELSA training

Supervisors were then asked to rate how familiar they were with the content of the ELSA training on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = not at all familiar and 5 = very familiar. The mean rating was 3.69, with scores ranging from 2 to 5 ($SD = 1.02$), indicating some variation in supervisors’ knowledge of the training content.

In line with this, 67% of supervisors ($n = 16$) stated that they sometimes referred back to the content of the training during supervision sessions. In most cases ($n = 12$) this was in relation to specific areas of content that were covered, such as social stories, bereavement, friendship skills, self-esteem, anger management and emotional development. Occasionally, training content was referred to in relation to administrative issues (e.g. internal forms). In one case, the group had recently looked through a new version of the training manual in order to see how it had changed.

The remaining 33% ($n = 8$) did not refer to the content of the training during their supervision sessions. Sometimes this was because they felt that they did not know the content well enough ($n = 3$) or because their ELSAs referred back to their training manuals independently ($n = 2$).

Feedback regarding sessions

Supervisors were also asked whether they sought feedback from ELSAs regarding whether their needs were being met through supervision. The majority of respondents did seek feedback but this was often through informal verbal responses during the sessions, rather than more formal methods of evaluation ($n = 11$). The following quotes provide an illustration of the types of responses received:

- *Inviting verbal feedback re: perceived helpfulness of this session, and whether balance between support and challenge feels right*
- *At start of session, ELSAs often mention how much they value the sessions when asked what they wish to get out of the session e.g. sense of belonging, good ideas, resolution of issues, safe place, opportunity to share etc*
- *I ask them but don't use a formal system, nor record their answers*
- *Visited this as a discussion in the last session to see how it felt since move to smaller groups*

Other supervisors took a more systematic approach and regularly reviewed group members' satisfaction. There was some variation in how often this was done. Some supervisors collected feedback at the end of each supervision session ($n = 8$) whilst others did so on an annual or bi-annual basis ($n = 4$). One supervisor had used a questionnaire to ascertain their group members' views, whilst another made reference to a general school questionnaire which had included a section on ELSA supervision.

Supervisors' supervision

Supervisors were asked about their own supervision needs. Firstly, they were asked where they would go for support if a situation arose during an ELSA supervision session that they were unsure of. The majority ($n = 16$) reported that they would speak to a colleague for advice. Other avenues of support included their own supervision sessions ($n = 11$; of which five specifically referred to peer supervision and two specifically referred to line manager supervision), the Educational Psychologist responsible for ELSA ($n = 9$), their

line manager or a senior EP ($n = 6$), the ELSA administrative support officer ($n = 1$) or resource material from the office ($n = 1$).

Supervisors were then asked how often they received formal supervision for their role as ELSA supervisor. The responses varied. Some respondents stated that they received such supervision on a regular basis, either half-termly ($n = 2$), termly ($n = 10$) or once or twice a year ($n = 3$). One had received supervision just once, although it was unclear how long they had been a supervisor. Others stated that they received it only when needed ($n = 2$), or as part of general supervision ($n = 2$). One supervisor had not received any ELSA supervision as yet, and two did not answer the question.

In spite of the variation in responses, the majority ($n = 20$ out of 23; 87%) were happy with the amount of supervision they received. One supervisor did not provide a response and the remaining two were not happy with the amount of supervision received. Of these, one was currently receiving supervision sessions on a half-termly basis and felt that this was too frequent:

- *This half termly pattern was too frequent. Significant issues rarely arise and need to be addressed promptly rather than waiting for the next EP supervision meeting. I would prefer to do this through peer or line management supervision when and as necessary*

Conversely, the other had only received supervision once so far and requested half-termly support:

- *Half termly, I have quite a tricky secondary group*

Supervisors were then specifically asked whether they ever sought advice or support from other colleagues in relation to issues raised during ELSA supervision sessions. All ($n = 23$) stated that they did. They were also asked whether they felt they received enough support for their role as supervisor. Twenty two stated that they did. The one supervisor who felt that they did not receive enough support requested a different emphasis during supervision sessions:

- *It is more about procedures etc and I would like a component about the experience of doing the work*

Other comments

Finally, supervisors were asked whether they had any other comments. Several provided additional comments here; all were positive about ELSA, stating how they found the supervision sessions rewarding and enjoyable. Some also highlighted the importance of supervision for ELSAs and the need to ensure they were well supported in their role.

3 ELSAS' VIEWS ON SUPERVISION

Questionnaires were sent to all ELSAs who had been in post for more than a year, as well as ELSAs who had just completed their training ('trainee

ELSAs'). As the questionnaire to trainee ELSAs centred on their expectations for supervision, their responses are presented first before moving on to those of ELSAs.

3.1 Trainee ELSAs

Questionnaires were received back from 32 trainee ELSAs, a response rate of 49%. Initially they were asked whether they had received any input during training on the role of supervision. Twenty four (75%) reported that they had received input on this, although three of these stated that they had only received a little information, and one stated that they could not remember much about what had been said. The following quotes provide an illustration of the types of comments made:

- *I was fully briefed by the EPs as to what to expect on day six of my ELSA training*
- *Yes. The importance of supervision and benefits, including bouncing ideas from other ELSAs and having the expertise of a trained Ed Psych*
- *We have been advised that supervision sessions will take place once per half term. That we must attend these. Our sessions are there to discuss how we are getting on in our ELSA role, how we may need support and share any difficulties*

Of the remainder, six stated that they had not received input on supervision – of these, two stated that they expected to receive information on it later in their training. A further two did not answer the question.

General views on supervision

Trainee ELSAs were then asked to rate how important they thought it would be for them to be part of a supervision group once they began work as an ELSA, using a scale of 1 – 5 (where 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important). The mean rating of 4.78 indicated that supervision was considered very important (range = 3 – 5, $SD = 0.61$). Supporting comments indicated that respondents felt supervision was important because it offered an opportunity to gain support from other ELSAs and the ELSA supervisor ($n = 15$), share ideas and resources ($n = 12$), learn through others' experiences ($n = 6$), discuss any difficulties ($n = 6$) and prevent feelings of isolation ($n = 2$). Some comments were more individual and included: help with confidence, a chance to offload and gain reassurance and feedback, support for wellbeing and safeguarding, and a chance to receive updates.

ELSAAs were also asked what they hoped to gain from supervision. Comments fell into two broad categories: support ($n = 21$) and advice and ideas ($n = 16$). The following quotes provide an illustration of the types of comments made:

- *Help and support in making sure I am doing the best for the pupils I work with*
- *Support, and knowing that I am doing things right, being able to talk through cases...and learn from one another*
- *I hope to be able to pool resources and keep up to date with fresh ideas*

- *How other ELSAs deal with various issues. Share ideas. Support from supervisor when required*

Others hoped to gain reassurance and confidence in their approach ($n = 6$) as well as a chance to unload any concerns ($n = 2$). Supervision was also viewed as an opportunity to offer mutual support to other ELSAs ($n = 2$). Other comments were more individual: supervision was also considered a chance to gain inspiration and a new perspective, share good practice, network, gain friendship, feel part of a bigger team and receive affirmation of any successes.

Trainee ELSAs were then asked whether they had any concerns or anxieties in relation to the supervision they were going to receive. Twenty one (66%) stated that they had no concerns at all, three stated that they had no concerns as yet, and two did not answer the question. The remaining six expressed some concern. Two of these comments related to being able to do the ELSA work, rather than supervision *per se*:

- *My only concern is if I get the chance to work as an ELSA. So far I haven't done any ELSA work at all*
- *A little worried I will not get the opportunity to use the knowledge I have gained from the training*

A further two comments related to the time required to attend supervision sessions:

- *No - apart from where/when it will be and if I will be given time off for it*
- *Not really - just the fact that there may be a lot of time required to attend sessions*

Of the remaining two respondents, one expressed some concern with regards to issues of confidentiality and one expressed concern over what to expect in supervision:

- *Only with regards to confidentiality - unhealthy cliques...*
- *Not really except that I don't know what to expect or what will be expected of me*

Other comments

Finally, trainee ELSAs were asked for any other comments. A number expressed gratitude for the course, stating that they were looking forward to starting work as an ELSA, whilst others re-iterated the importance of both ELSA and supervision in supporting children in school.

3.2 ELSA questionnaire responses

The questionnaire sent to practicing ELSAs was more detailed than that sent to ELSA supervisors and trainee ELSAs. It asked a range of questions including those relating to:

- ELSAs' views on the frequency and duration of supervision sessions and size of their supervision group, and their general attendance at supervision sessions
- The helpfulness of the sessions, their relationship with their supervisor and group members, and the perceived impact on children in receipt of ELSA
- Their current supervision needs and the role of group supervision.

Two hundred and seventy ELSAs responded; this was a response rate of 43%. This was high for an exercise of this type. Of these, 43% ($n = 116$) had been an ELSA for 1 – 3 years, 44% ($n = 118$) had been an ELSA for 3 – 6 years and 13% ($n = 34$) had been an ELSA for more than 6 years; two did not answer this question.

Attendance at supervision sessions

Attendance at supervision sessions was generally good. Just under half of respondents ($n = 129$, 48%) had attended all the supervision sessions offered to them in the last year. Where sessions were missed, this tended to be due to school commitments ($n = 61$), illness or hospital appointments ($n = 40$), clashes with training courses ($n = 12$) or due to not being in school at the time of the meeting ($n = 13$), either because of a family bereavement, holiday, jury service, part-time hours or strike action. In a minority of cases, administrative problems had impeded attendance. For example, occasionally respondents had not received information about the date of their session or what supervision group they were in ($n = 6$) or there was a last minute change of date or venue ($n = 3$). In a further two cases, one respondent stated that the venue was too far away to travel to (although this had since been resolved) and one had mixed up the dates of the sessions. On average, each ELSA had missed 1.36 sessions ($SD = 0.60$) during the previous year. The maximum number missed was four.

Frequency and length of supervision sessions and size of the group

Nearly all the ELSAs felt that they were offered the right number of supervision sessions (95%; 248 out of 262), that the sessions lasted for the right length of time (95%; 249 out of 263) and that the size of their group was about right (93%; 244 out of 261).

Of the remainder, some respondents wanted more frequent sessions ($n = 4$; all suggested monthly) whilst others wanted less frequent sessions ($n = 10$). Of these, most suggested termly meetings with the EP available by email in between. Similarly, some respondents wanted longer sessions ($n = 9$) – with most suggesting that three hours would be better – whilst some ($n = 4$) wanted shorter sessions. In one case, this was because the group was smaller now and so less time was needed, and in another case, the respondent wanted the session to finish at the same time as the school day. Just one ELSA wanted their group to be smaller, suggesting that two to four group members would be better. A further 16 wanted their group to be larger, with suggestions ranging from 8 – 15. It was felt that this would allow for absentees, and also for more varied discussion amongst the group members.

Supervision needs

Respondents were asked what they look for from supervision sessions. All but three respondents provided an answer, with a number providing more than one response. The most common response related to advice, problem solving and gaining new ideas ($n = 247$). The following quotes provide an illustration of typical comments:

- *A place to ask questions about planning and ideas... Help to understand the reason behind a child's behaviour and how to approach a difficult situation*
- *Chance to share any difficulties re ELSA role and problem solve these.*
- *Chance to share strategies/resources/concerns/work out solutions through sharing knowledge and expertise.*
- *Guidance to know you are on the right track, or help to look at things differently.*

General support was also flagged as a key supervision need ($n = 142$). Additionally, some respondents gave more specific responses about the nature of support sought. Some highlighted practical support, in the form of sharing resources ($n = 44$), receiving training ($n = 18$) and gaining updates on guidelines ($n = 10$), whilst others emphasised emotional support, in the form of receiving reassurance and gaining in confidence ($n = 39$) and being given the opportunity to offload any concerns ($n = 11$). The opportunity to network with other ELSAs was also valued ($n = 8$). The following quotes provide a flavour of the responses given:

- *A chance to share resources*
- *Learning or reinforcing areas discussed from the course a few years ago*
- *Sharing of concerns and areas I feel stuck on*
- *Confidence - I'm never sure I'm doing the 'right thing' in school*
- *Support from other ELSAs - a chance to 'network'. Also being kept up to date by the EP*

Encouragingly, 89% ($n = 239$) of ELSAs stated that the present supervision arrangements met these needs, whilst a further 3% ($n = 9$) stated that the supervision arrangements partly, or sometimes, met their needs. Seven per cent ($n = 19$) stated that the arrangements did not meet their needs. One respondent was unsure whether the arrangements met their needs and two did not answer the question. In line with this, supervision sessions were perceived to be very helpful, with ELSAs providing a mean rating of 4.38 ($SD = 0.88$) out of 5, where 1 = not at all helpful and 5 = very helpful.

Those individuals who stated that the current supervision arrangements did not meet their needs, or only partly met their needs, were asked how the sessions could be improved to address this. As might be expected, some of the responses were quite individual. However, several key themes emerged. Six of the respondents were keen for more input from their supervisor during supervision sessions, rather than focusing on group discussion:

- *EP to have knowledge and have readily available suggestions and ideas - present EP rarely has any input or suggestions - she throws it open to others and rarely contributes*
- *Although the EP is...lovely...we mostly problem solve together as a group with little input, if any, from the EP*
- *EP could give more solid advice and go into the psychology of children's issues more*

Other respondents were eager for more discussion time ($n = 4$). One respondent suggested that the sessions needed more structure, and clearer time management, whilst a further three simply requested more time to discuss key issues.

- *More time is needed to problem solve and for quieter group members to be heard*
- *Sometimes we don't have enough time to discuss/share everything we plan to*

Other respondents requested a change in the structure of the groups. Two respondents wanted a larger group and two wanted more experienced ELSAs within their group. The remaining suggestions were more individual but all related to a change in the content of the sessions. These requests included: a focus on general issues and pre-agreed topics rather than individual cases, greater theoretical input during topic-based sessions, talks from outside agencies, and discussion of useful resources or activities.

The role of the supervisor

ELSAs were subsequently asked to rate the role of their supervisor in a range of areas, identified from the existing literature. Ratings were made on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = not at all and 5= very much so. As Table 1 reveals, mean ratings were high. With the exception of 'help you to manage your workload', which received a somewhat lower rating, each area received a mean rating of 4.20 or more, indicating that respondents found their supervisor to be a useful source of support in a variety of areas.

Respondents were also asked to suggest any other ways in which their supervisor helped them, in order to ensure that responses were not limited to those previously identified by the literature. The most common response was that their supervisor was easily contactable if the ELSA needed advice outside of supervision ($n = 47$). Linked to this, supervisors were also perceived to be good listeners, always ready to listen and respond to the ELSA and the other members of the group ($n = 26$):

- *Always tells us she is available if we want to contact her*
- *Knowing that she will answer an email promptly if a situation has arisen where extra guidance has been necessary*
- *She is a listener, an anchor too. We all know we can call her if we need to. She always follows through if you ask her a question. She gets back to you. She's reliable.*

- *My supervisor is extremely proactive, providing lots of great ideas and information but most importantly she listens to the needs of the group members and responds to individual questions, problems, she is fab.*

Table 1: ELSA views on the role of the supervisor

Does your supervisor....	Mean rating	SD (Range)
Enable you to become actively involved in supervision sessions	4.55	0.70 (2 – 5)
Help you feel at ease with the supervision process	4.53	0.76 (1 – 5)
Check with you that you're getting what you want from the sessions	4.35	0.81 (2 – 5)
Encourage you to consider new ways of working with children involved in ELSA	4.31	0.88 (1 – 5)
Give you new understanding about the thoughts, feelings and actions of children involved in ELSA	4.25	0.93 (1 – 5)
Help you to clarify objectives in working with children involved in ELSA	4.20	0.92 (1 – 5)
Help you to manage your workload	3.70	1.05 (1 – 5)

As touched upon previously when discussing supervision needs, ELSAs also highlighted the fact that their supervisor provided emotional support, through praise, reassurance and acknowledgment of the role ELSAs play in school ($n = 26$), as well as practical support, through suggesting useful resources ($n = 20$), new ideas or ways forward for particular problems ($n = 22$) and information about opportunities for training ($n = 14$), as well as following up on queries or requests for information ($n = 7$).

A number of more individual responses were also given, including: providing specific advice on a range of issues, liaising with other staff in school and promoting ELSA within school, sharing ELSA successes with the group, managing the sessions effectively to ensure no time is wasted, providing up-to-date research in relation to particular topics, providing feedback on planning for ELSA sessions, and modelling suggested approaches.

ELSAs were subsequently asked whether there was anything else their ELSA could do to support them. Forty seven ELSAs (17%) provided a suggestion here. A number of the comments related to greater contact with the ELSA's school, either in terms of liaising with school staff and promoting the role of ELSA in school ($n = 5$) or visiting the ELSA's school and having direct contact with children in receipt of ELSA support ($n = 6$). Additionally, ELSAs were keen for supervisors to provide further information on training opportunities ($n = 5$), provide one-to-one support ($n = 4$), be available in between sessions ($n = 3$), listen to the group and take on board feedback ($n = 3$), model strategies and activities ($n = 2$), and focus on more specific topics ($n = 2$). More individual responses suggested that supervisors could: facilitate contact

between ELSAs from feeder and receiving schools, facilitate resource sharing amongst ELSAs, look over ELSAs' session plans, provide more time to look at resources, provide more theoretical input, and use DVDs to demonstrate activities.

ELSA's relationships with their supervisor

Overall, respondents rated their relationship with their supervisor as being very good (mean = 4.43 out of 5, where 1 = very poor and 5 = very good; *SD* = 0.81; range = 1 – 5). The most common additional comments described how their supervisor was approachable, friendly and easy to contact (*n* = 130):

- *She is very friendly, encouraging and puts you at your ease. No question is too stupid! You don't feel inferior or inadequate. She's very understanding and sympathetic*
- *Very approachable in session or if I needed to see my supervisor about any other area I would feel comfortable asking for advice*

Additionally, supervisors were perceived to be knowledgeable (*n* = 45), supportive and understanding (*n* = 44), and good listeners (*n* = 23); these qualities were felt to strengthen the relationship ELSAs had with them. The following quotes provide an illustration of typical comments made:

- *Friendly approach but also bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to the group*
- *I have real respect for my supervisor and her knowledge. It is invaluable*
- *There is mutual trust and friendship. I feel very well supported and hope that she does too. I respect her and value the professionalism*
- *She offers good professional support*
- *I feel I'm listened to and my work is appreciated*
- *Good listener willing to focus on what we need to. Helpful with coming up with ideas*

Some of the respondents described how they had worked with their supervisor in other capacities and so had built up a positive working relationship over the years (*n* = 5). The issue of knowing a supervisor outside of supervision sessions will be returned to later. Other comments described how the supervisor was professional and fair (*n* = 6), non-judgemental (*n* = 6), valued the group's contribution (*n* = 5), had a sense of humour (*n* = 4), made time for everyone (*n* = 4) and was organised (*n* = 3) and calm (*n* = 3).

In a minority of cases, ELSAs felt that they did not have a very good relationship with their supervisor. Sometimes, this was because they had a new supervisor, and so their relationship was still developing (*n* = 4), or because they simply felt they did not know their supervisor very well at this point (*n* = 8). In other cases, more specific reasons were given. A small number felt that their supervisor did not listen to them (*n* = 3), was difficult to talk to or approach for guidance (*n* = 4) or did not have sufficient knowledge (*n* = 2).

Nearly half (43%; $n = 117$) of the ELSAs knew their supervisor outside of supervision sessions, mainly through their work with the school, and occasionally as a trainer for a course the ELSA had been on. In general, ELSAs were happy regardless of whether they knew their supervisor in any other capacity. Those who knew their supervisor outside of sessions suggested that this was a benefit ($n = 61$). Some provided further detail, with a number describing how the prior contact enabled their supervisor to have a better insight into cases brought to supervision as they sometimes already knew the children or at least understood the workings of the school ($n = 27$). Knowing their supervisor outside of supervision also made some ELSAs feel more at ease ($n = 4$) and more able to approach their supervisor ($n = 2$). None of the respondents who knew their supervisor outside of supervision described this as being unhelpful.

Equally, those who did not know their supervisor outside of sessions were generally happy about it ($n = 20$), with some adding that it meant that any conversations were impartial, and not biased by prior experiences ($n = 7$). Twelve respondents did however feel that it would be helpful to see their supervisor in school as well as in supervision sessions, with some suggesting that this would increase the supervisor's knowledge of specific children ($n = 7$) and allow more time for the supervisor's relationship with the ELSA to develop ($n = 2$).

ELSA's were also asked whether they had ever contacted their supervisor for support outside of supervision. Seventy two (27%) stated that they had. Of these, 58% knew their supervisor outside of supervision.

ELSA's relationships with members of the supervision group

Respondents also rated their relationship with other members of the group as very good (mean = 4.45 out of 5; $SD = 0.66$; range = 2 – 5). In line with this, many of the respondents gave a very positive description of their relationship with their group, with the most common response describing the feeling of support they derived from the other members ($n = 60$):

- *I feel at ease within the group and know that they will support me with any problems I may be having during ELSA sessions*
- *All have very similar roles and therefore similar difficulties occur. Very good support and understanding from group*
- *As a group we help each other problem solve, I feel our group has a good bond and feel I could call any of them to ask their advice*

Linked to this, ELSAs also described how friendly and at ease their group was ($n = 30$), with a number specifically noting the sense of humour shared amongst group members. Others emphasised the respectful discussions that took place amongst group members ($n = 26$):

- *We are easy in each other's company and share empathy for matters arising*
- *Everyone at ease with each other*

- *Discussion is shared - no one person takes over*
- *All members of group are willing to listen and offer advice*

In addition to supporting each other with advice and ideas, group members also helped each other with resources ($n = 19$). There was a sense of camaraderie amongst many of the ELSAs, with a number noting that they felt part of a team within their supervision group ($n = 14$). It was felt that members had common interests and aims ($n = 5$) and, importantly, a shared understanding of 'local' issues which helped to facilitate discussion ($n = 8$).

- *Good rapport. Team feeling*
- *We 'gel' very well together*
- *We all share common goals, experience similar circumstances in our school environment*
- *All working locally - able to understand any problems we are going through*
- *We are all from the same area and share the same issues*
- *As we are all feeder schools and in close proximity to each other, so all know families*

A number of the respondents also described how they kept in touch outside of supervision, for example to share resources or to liaise over school issues, such as transfers ($n = 12$).

Some of the respondents described how they had trained together, been in the same group for some time, or knew each other outside of ELSA, and so had had the opportunity to get to know each other well ($n = 32$). This issue will be returned to later. Others were new to their group. In most cases, this was perceived to be working well, although in some cases respondents felt unable to comment on the group's relationship at this early stage, whilst others felt they were getting to know their group members better with each meeting ($n = 11$). In other cases, though, the change in group structure was perceived to be negative ($n = 4$), with some bemoaning particularly quiet new members or suggesting that their relationship with the new members was not as good as with previous members.

Respondents also noted that they got on better with some members than others. Several highlighted particularly dominating members ($n = 5$) who sometimes took over during meetings, whilst others noted that they knew some members, such as those who attended sessions regularly, better than others ($n = 4$). Two members felt somewhat excluded from their group, with one describing how they felt 'inferior' compared to some members and another suggesting that their school experienced different issues to the other group members' schools, and so they had little in common.

Nearly half (46%; 125 of the 270) knew at least one of their group members outside of supervision. One hundred and twelve of these provided further explanation regarding how they knew the member. In most cases ($n = 85$), contact was in a work capacity; either as a colleague in their current school (n

= 52) or in a different – often feeder – school ($n = 14$), through a different or previous job role ($n = 8$), as a parent of a child in their school or vice versa ($n = 5$), or through meeting on training courses ($n = 11$). In the remaining cases, contact was social, either as a friend or neighbour ($n = 20$) or as a relative ($n = 2$).

On the whole, knowing group members outside of supervision was perceived to be non-problematic and, in many cases, a positive aspect ($n = 55$). Where ELSAs attended with another colleague from school, this was felt to aid discussion ($n = 19$), by allowing for shared understanding of school-specific issues and providing an additional support network.

ELSAAs were able to provide a range of examples of how knowing a group member outside of supervision was helpful. It was felt to aid transition support ($n = 8$), result in a more supportive ‘team’ atmosphere ($n = 8$), facilitate discussion ($n = 4$) and offer reassurance, particularly when new to a group ($n = 3$), as well as greater opportunity for sharing resources ($n = 2$). At a more practical level, it helped with travel plans, for example in allowing group members to car share to supervision sessions.

In general, confidentiality was not felt to be an issue. Two respondents specifically stated that they did not discuss work outside of ELSA sessions, and so did not feel that it impinged on them in any way, whilst another stated that rules around confidentiality had been agreed. Nevertheless, two respondents felt that knowing others in the group prevented open discussion.

Those ELSAs who did not know anyone outside of supervision sessions were generally unconcerned by this ($n = 16$). Indeed, some saw it as a benefit, suggesting that it ensured professionalism ($n = 7$), new ideas ($n = 3$) and confidentiality ($n = 3$), thereby promoting open and non-judgemental discussion. However, some felt that it might be beneficial to know members outside of the group ($n = 10$), with three suggesting that it would be particularly helpful to visit other ELSAs in their schools, and one suggesting that it would aid transition support for children.

Advantages of group supervision

The questionnaire then moved on to consider the way in which supervision was provided to ELSAs. On the whole, group supervision was perceived to be advantageous, with just three respondents raising reservations. Of these, two acknowledged that group supervision could be helpful, but not in the present format, whilst a third suggested that a training day could fulfil a similar role:

- *Not at present as a group as the meetings have no real focus, purpose*
- *I think the group works, but it needs to be more specific, such as set supervisors to deal with different areas*
- *As a group, similar needs could be met as a group by training (identify common ground and focus)*

The remaining respondents were positive about receiving supervision as a group, with the majority highlighting how it facilitated members’ ability to share

ideas, experiences and resources ($n = 226$). Some of these respondents flagged the fact that meeting as a group enabled a broader range of topics to be touched upon.

- *Yes - lots of ideas are brought to the sessions, plus we can share resources*
- *Good use of everyone's time, good way to share experiences with a group*
- *Pooling ideas. Exchanging resources. Mutual encouragement/reassurance. Insight into how others work*

In addition to providing a broader source of knowledge and experiences, the supervision group was perceived to be a useful support network ($n = 65$), providing individuals with a chance to offload, celebrate successes, and gain reassurance about their work. In line with this, a number of ELSAs specifically noted the importance of the group in creating a sense of unity, and reducing feelings of isolation ($n = 12$); this was perceived to be particularly important as much of ELSA work is carried out on an individual basis.

- *The support from others in the same role is so valuable*
- *As it gives a lot more ideas and a feeling of unity - sometimes I feel pressure from colleagues that I'm singled out, while they struggle with day to day work*
- *You feel you are not alone. You discover that you have similar issues*
- *The "you are not alone" when at times you feel that you are not being effective or have a problem. It is very valuable*

Group supervision was also favoured as it was perceived to be less daunting than one-to-one supervision ($n = 6$), and therefore offered a more relaxed opportunity in which to gain support.

- *Group def. better - more ideas to share and chance for training in bigger groups, less daunting. We know supervisor is happy to see us on an individual basis if needed*
- *I would find individual supervision too intimidating*

Other perceived benefits included being able to share local knowledge regarding children and families ($n = 2$), gain contact with other ELSAs, particularly those from feeder schools ($n = 3$), and gain more frequent contact with the EP than might otherwise be available with one-to-one support ($n = 3$).

Disadvantages of group supervision

Most ELSAs did not feel there were any disadvantages to having group supervision ($n = 210$). Of these, several qualified their responses, indicating that they did not feel that there were any disadvantages to their *particular* group ($n = 3$), whilst others added that there were no disadvantages because individual support was also available, either immediately after a supervision session or by telephone or email between sessions ($n = 20$).

Other ELSAs suggested a range of disadvantages which might arise as a result of receiving supervision as a group. The most common concern was that there was sometimes insufficient time to discuss all cases in enough detail ($n = 24$). Linked to this, some ELSAs described how certain members of the group tended to dominate proceedings ($n = 11$) and this could prevent others from having sufficient time to talk about their own cases. On the flip side, other ELSAs described how some members might be reticent to speak in front of others or ask what might be perceived to be a 'silly' question ($n = 3$).

- *Lack of opportunity to discuss cases in depth.*
- *Sometimes there is not enough time to discuss or help*
- *Some individuals dominate group time, can be negative about work or schools*
- *Sometimes time can be a factor if one or two individuals take up more of this than others*
- *Sometimes you can feel that a question you have may be silly and there is not always enough time to address problems or enquiries fully*

It was also acknowledged that it could be difficult to discuss personal or sensitive issues ($n = 10$), with several ELSAs stating that they could not always provide full details about a case, and found it difficult to remember not to name children. A further concern was that not all issues discussed in the group were relevant to all the group members ($n = 4$); it was acknowledged, though, that such discussions may well be useful in the future and, in any case, helped to prevent feelings of isolation.

- *Some issues may be of a very sensitive nature that you may not be able to bring to the group due to confidentiality*
- *Some things you may not be able to share*
- *The main disadvantage is that other ELSAs may work in a different environment and not fully relate to your situation*
- *Sometimes the topic is irrelevant to me at that time, however I try to pick up ideas for future responses*

Perceived impact of ELSA

ELSAs were also asked to rate their perceptions of the impact of ELSA supervision specifically in terms of:

- Their personal and professional development
- Children in their school
- Colleagues in their school
- The school as a whole

As Table 2 reveals, ELSA supervision was felt to have a beneficial impact on all areas. As might be expected, the greatest impact was perceived to be in relation to the practitioners themselves, and the children receiving ELSA.

Table 2: Perceived impact of ELSA supervision (where 1 = no impact and 5 = great impact)

Perceived impact of ELSA supervision on:	Mean	SD	Range
Personal and professional development (<i>n</i> = 266)	4.05	0.86	1 - 5
Children worked with as part of ELSA (<i>n</i> = 264)	4.12	0.82	1 - 5
Other children in school (<i>n</i> = 260)	3.59	1.06	1 - 5
Colleagues in school (<i>n</i> = 260)	3.44	1.12	1 – 5
The school as a whole (<i>n</i> = 258)	3.79	1.00	1 – 5

Impact on personal and professional development

ELSAs described how supervision helped to extend their knowledge and awareness (*n* = 65) and increase their confidence (*n* = 45), meaning that they felt better able to support children in their role as an ELSA. Additionally, supervision was felt to give ELSA support a higher status, and thus had led to greater recognition of the role in school (*n* = 10). At a professional level, ELSAs described how the role was useful for their Curriculum Vitae and had helped with promotions or increases in salary in school (*n* = 4) and with establishing targets in performance reviews (*n* = 3). Four ELSAs felt that there had been a limited impact of supervision on their development.

Impact on children worked with as part of ELSA

ELSAs described how supervision provided them with new ideas to try with children in school, by enabling impartial discussion about children in school and other children with similar issues (*n* = 95), as well as the expertise and confidence to put these ideas into practice (*n* = 15). Others provided examples of the positive impact this had had on the children they had worked with (*n* = 25), in terms of the children's confidence, happiness and general enjoyment of the ELSA sessions. Some ELSAs were more cautious, with five suggesting that it depended on the particular child. As some of the group members worked with children of different ages, some of the ideas gained in supervision could not always be applied to the particular children the ELSA worked with. One ELSA also felt that the impact on children was limited as there was insufficient opportunity to discuss cases in detail during supervision, whilst another ELSA suggested that supervision sessions took up time that could be used for actual ELSA work.

Impact on other children

Some respondents felt that there had also been an indirect benefit on other children in their school, not just those receiving ELSA. This was felt to be mainly due to a greater awareness of the service provided, such that all children were aware that the ELSA was available for them to speak to (*n* = 24), and thus the ELSA was able to apply the skills and ideas acquired through supervision to all children in the school, not just those in receipt of ELSA (*n* = 61). Other children were also felt to have benefited by the support provided to their classmates through ELSA (*n* = 12). Examples given referred to improved peer interactions, better behaviour in class and a reduction in angry outbursts, all of which were felt to have had a positive impact on other children in school. Support provided to other staff (*n* = 3) was also felt to have had a positive impact on other children in school. Four ELSAs stated that they

only worked with children referred for ELSA, and so did not feel there had been an impact on other children. An additional two ELSAs suggested supervision could potentially have a negative impact on other children in school, by taking the ELSA away from normal school-based duties.

Impact on colleagues in school

Perceptions of impact on other colleagues in school were somewhat mixed. In some cases, the ELSA role was perceived to be valued, and understood, by colleagues, such that ELSAs felt able to offer advice, information, resources and support to colleagues ($n = 65$). Supervision was felt to be particularly important here in terms of providing ELSAs with the confidence to offer suggestions to colleagues. In some cases, the ELSA took queries from colleagues to supervision ($n = 2$). Additionally, colleagues were more confident about asking for support from the ELSA. Three ELSAs specifically highlighted the fact that colleagues were more likely to make referrals to the ELSA now.

As with other children in the school, staff were also perceived to have benefited from improvements in the children receiving one-to-one time through ELSA ($n = 10$), with several ELSAs noting that their role helped to relieve pressure from their colleagues. Two ELSAs also noted that supervision had helped to make them to be more assertive with colleagues regarding their workload; for example, explaining that referrals needed to go on a waiting list, rather than trying to fit all children in at once.

Linked to the above, in some cases, supervision was perceived to have led to greater recognition of the ELSA role in school ($n = 13$). On the other hand, some ELSAs suggested that there was still a lack of awareness in school of what the ELSA role involved, and consequently a lack of support from colleagues ($n = 10$). Some other negatives were noted. In some cases, the ELSA was unsure whether there had been an impact on colleagues, or felt that it depended on the particular colleague ($n = 4$). Three pointed out that colleagues had to provide cover for supervision sessions, which could prove tricky ($n = 3$). Finally, one ELSA suggested that they had experienced resentment from some staff who did not have the time to provide one to one support for children.

Impact on whole school

Overall, there was perceived to be a positive impact on the whole school, with many ELSAs describing general benefits for the school and re-iterating the positive impact on pupils and staff ($n = 24$). More specific examples were also given. ELSAs described how the school had a more supportive atmosphere ($n = 21$), where children were calmer and happier ($n = 7$) and better behaved ($n = 2$). There was felt to be greater recognition of, and support for, the ELSA role ($n = 20$) and increased confidence that the ELSA's training was up-to-date ($n = 2$), as well as a greater commitment from the school to the ELSA's training. There was also a sense that the school was working as a team ($n = 3$). One ELSA highlighted the improved links with parents and outside agencies. In some cases, the ELSA role had been expanded, allowing ideas to be rolled out across the school or extra interventions (such as therapeutic

story writing) to be implemented ($n = 3$). A small minority felt that there had not been a positive impact on the school ($n = 7$) or were unsure whether there had been ($n = 3$). In part, this was due to the time away from school necessitated by supervision ($n = 3$).

ELSAs were also asked to provide specific examples of how supervision had impacted on their practice. A large range of examples were provided and a selection of these is included in Appendix A.

Contact with parents

Finally, ELSAs were asked about their level of contact with parents in their role as ELSA. Whilst this issue is not directly related to the issue of supervision, the extent to which ELSAs feel confident about liaising with parents is an area that could potentially be addressed within supervision and so questions relating to this were nevertheless included in the questionnaire. Most ELSAs had a moderate amount of contact with parents ($n = 150$), with a minority having a lot of contact ($n = 48$) or very little contact ($n = 68$). Those who had limited contact with parents were asked whether there were any barriers that prevented them from having contact. In most cases, contact with parents was simply another member of staff's responsibility ($n = 33$). In other cases, time constraints made it difficult to make contact ($n = 5$) or parents were often not keen to have contact ($n = 5$). Some ELSAs felt that it had not been necessary to have contact with parents ($n = 10$).

Other suggested barriers were more individual. In some cases, practical issues had minimised contact with parents; for example, in one case an ELSA described the difficulties of finding a suitable time for both parents and teachers to attend a meeting with them, whilst in another case, most parents did not come to the school to pick the children up, and so contact was through a home/school book. In another case, it was the head teacher's decision that the ELSA should not have contact with parents. In one other case, the ELSA did not feel confident enough to make contact with parents at this stage.

Where more frequent contact with parents took place, ELSAs were asked whether they felt this was helpful and, if so, in what way. Some simply stated that they felt it was helpful but did not expand on why ($n = 26$). Others provided further information on this. The majority highlighted that contact with parents was helpful as it could provide additional information about the child and a new insight from the parent's perspective ($n = 83$). This was felt to allow parents to express any concerns they might have and help the ELSA to gain an understanding of certain issues from the parent's perspective, helping to clarify the aims and objectives of their ELSA work. It was also felt to promote a consistent approach from both home and school ($n = 31$) and improve the relationship between parents and school by maintaining communication and trust and encouraging parents to make contact in future ($n = 24$). Linked to this, ELSAs noted that contact with parents offered a valuable chance to receive feedback on the child's progress ($n = 7$). It was also acknowledged that contact with parents could also help to improve parents' skills and, potentially, their relationship with their child.

Other ELSAs were less sure whether having contact with parents was beneficial. In some cases, it was felt to depend on the parent ($n = 3$). Occasionally, it could lead to difficulties, such as the parent handing over full responsibility to the ELSA for the child's difficulties ($n = 1$) or wanting help with unrelated home-based issues ($n = 1$). One ELSA suggested that it could sometimes be difficult when parents wanted to know details of what had been discussed during ELSA sessions.

Other comments

ELSAAs were also invited to add any additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. Many of these simply re-iterated issues which had come up previously in the questionnaire, although several new issues did emerge. As might be expected, some of these were quite individual. A small minority ($n = 4$) expressed concern over the future of supervision sessions, particularly given the cost:

- *With school budgets being pushed I am grateful that my school values what I do and is prepared to pay for supervision. I don't know what would happen if it becomes more expensive*
- *I hope this continues to be the norm and that this is not another service taken away or changed.*

Others ($n = 3$) expressed unhappiness over the re-organisation of the supervision groups:

- *I understand why changes had to be made to our supervision groups, but I feel saddened that having been together for quite some time we have now been split and new/different ELSAs from other areas have taken their place*
- *As a group we have got to know each other professionally and gel. But we feel disappointed as our group has been split against all our wishes, we try to contribute by offering ideas we think would benefit us in our role, but feel frustrated as we don't feel listened to or supported*

Other comments requested more help in particular areas ($n = 4$), with two suggesting that counselling skills would be a helpful addition, either to the initial training or a supervision session. The way in which support was provided was also referred to by one ELSA, with the suggestion that an online support forum might offer a useful, additional way of providing support for ELSAs, provided the necessary structures were put in place:

- *I feel an online forum or e-group would be helpful. There are problems that would need to be overcome such as moderation, strict content privacy rules etc but I feel this could make the ELSA scheme more of a network.*

It was also suggested that offering 'grades' within the ELSA role might be a useful way of structuring the role:

- *Are there any plans to offer progression within the ELSA framework, maybe advanced skills ELSAs to promote good practice in schools*

The remaining comments reinforced comments made earlier in the questionnaire. A small minority ($n = 4$) repeated negative comments regarding concerns over the quality of the supervision they were receiving. The remainder made positive comments regarding ELSA and supervision sessions ($n = 66$). The following quotes provide a flavour of the types of comments that were made:

- *I think that ELSA supervision is an important part of my role. The more that I work as an ELSA the more I need the supervision. I couldn't work properly without this support*
- *ELSA supervision is an integral part of being an ELSA. It helps us to grow and develop and prevents us from becoming complacent. Thanks to [supervisor] for all her support. She is one in a million*
- *I would like to say a big thank you to my supervisor... she is fab and I cannot sing her praises enough! I love my role as ELSA and I know that [EP's] supervision gives me the opportunity to enhance my skills, reflect on my role and strive to improve!*
- *If there had not been supervision groups when I first became an ELSA I don't think I would be doing as well as I am now. I feel confident in the role and enjoy it very much, much of this is due, I'm sure, to the support I was given at the beginning and am still receiving*
- *The supervision groups have been really important for my development as an ELSA. Being an ELSA for only a year, I feel that the groups have given me an excellent level of support professionally and personally to continue to develop my role for the school and children*

4 SUMMARY

Overall then, the responses to the three questionnaires were extremely positive. The responses from ELSA supervisors indicated that sessions tended to follow a similar pattern and offered an opportunity for discussion and problem solving, as well as more focused items on particular 'high interest' topics. Whilst there was considerable variation in the frequency of supervision that supervisors themselves received in relation to their ELSA work, the majority were happy with the amount of supervision received and all but one stated that they felt they received enough support in their role as ELSA supervisor.

Trainee ELSAs expressed equally positive views about supervision, rating it as a very important aspect of their work. Their expectations of supervision centred on gaining support, advice and ideas, as well as the opportunity to share any worries. Encouragingly, this is in line with the description of currently-practising ELSAs' own experiences of supervision. Most trainee ELSAs had no concerns about supervision, although a small number expressed worries about being able to take time out of school in order to attend sessions.

In general, the views of currently-practising ELSAs were very positive. Nearly all the ELSAs felt that they were offered the right number of supervision sessions, that the sessions lasted for the right length of time and that the size of their group was about right. Supervision was seen as an opportunity to gain advice and new ideas, as well as support (both emotional and practical).

Nearly all the ELSAs felt that their supervision needs were being met. A small minority were keen for greater input from their supervisor during sessions, whilst others made requests for specific changes to the content of the sessions. Supervisors were perceived to play a variety of roles previously identified in the literature (e.g. Borders & Leddick, 1987, cited in Hawkins & Shohet, 2007), such as helping ELSAs to feel at ease with the supervision process, become actively involved in sessions, clarify their objectives, consider new ways of working with children, and gain greater understanding into the thoughts, feelings and actions of the children they worked with. To a lesser extent, supervisors were also perceived to help ELSAs in managing their workloads. Other roles not previously noted in the literature were also highlighted. These included being easily available if the ELSA needed advice outside of supervision, offering a listening ear to all members of the group, providing emotional support, suggesting new resources or training opportunities, and helping to plan a way forward.

In general, ELSAs reported that they had a good relationship with their supervisor. In a minority of cases, ELSAs felt that they did not have a very good relationship with their supervisor. Sometimes, this was because they had a new supervisor, and so their relationship was still developing, or because they simply felt they did not know their supervisor very well at this point. A very small number felt that their supervisor did not listen to them, was difficult to talk to or approach for guidance or did not have sufficient knowledge.

Nearly half of the ELSAs knew their supervisor outside of their group (for example, through their work with the school or through previous training) and this was generally perceived to be a good thing as it meant that the supervisor often already had a good understanding of the case brought along to supervision, or at least had prior insight into the particular workings of the school. Equally, though, where supervisees did not know their supervisor outside of their group, this was also perceived to be a good thing, as it meant that cases could be considered independently, without prior knowledge potentially clouding their viewpoint. Some ELSAs felt that it would be useful for their supervisor to have more contact with their school, with a view to gaining a better insight into the issues faced by the ELSA. In general though, respondents tended to be happy with whatever their particular situation was, whether or not they knew their supervisor in any other capacity.

ELSA's also reported that they generally had a good relationship with other members of the group. Nearly half knew at least one of their group members outside of supervision, either in a work capacity or socially. On the whole, knowing group members outside of supervision was perceived to be non-problematic and, in many cases, was a positive factor. However, in a minority

of cases, it was felt that this compromised members' ability to speak openly and honestly. This issue aside, the fact that the sessions are group-based was generally perceived very positively as it was felt that this enabled a range of views and experiences to be shared, and led to a supportive atmosphere, helping to reduce feelings of isolation. At times, though, it was perceived to limit the time available to discuss individual cases, or more personal or sensitive issues. It was nevertheless acknowledged that one-to-one support could generally be accessed, either at the end of a supervision session or via telephone or email in between sessions.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulty in directly linking supervision with any impact on practice, supervision was perceived to have had a positive impact on ELSAs' work, not only in terms of children worked with directly, but also more broadly within school. Specific examples illustrated how supervision had enabled ELSAs to gain insight into a particular scenario, as well as learn about new resources and strategies, and gain the confidence to use these, leading to a better outcome for those involved. A number of ELSAs described how their school felt calmer and happier as a result.

In general then, views were very positive. A minority of ELSAs expressed concerns about the quality of support they were receiving and these should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, the majority reported that their supervision needs were being met and that they had a good relationship with both their supervisor and other group members. Supervision was generally considered a helpful opportunity for ELSAs to discuss cases and share ideas with other like-minded individuals, whilst also gaining reassurance about their approach to particular cases. This suggests that, for most, the current way of offering supervision is effective and offers a highly-valued line of support for ELSAs.

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Appendix A: Examples of impact on practice

- *We had a session about "I'm wondering...." I found this very useful when trying to talk to less communicative pupils. I learnt about the Boxall Profile from another ELSA and we have it now in our school so I can start to use it with some of my pupils as an assessment tool and ideas of what to do (class teacher willing!)*
- *A session where I discussed a student who was waiting for a CAMHS referral - I was providing a "listening ear" role, rather than a proactive ELSA - my supervision group helped me to facilitate this - we did craft work and drawing as a result, so she was more comfortable talking. I felt that I had gained a new dimension, rather than feeling helpless*
- *Child's parents divorced. Had recently had session about this subject on ELSA session therefore I felt confident to offer correct support and advice and activities etc to help child*
- *Pupil with very poor attendance and traveller lifestyle - starting coming to school - help with work and ensuring she eats and had break time with a friend*
- *Supporting a child with very severe behaviour problems. Sharing this with others in my group helped to address new ideas and ways to support. Although the issue has not been completely resolved, the child has made positive improvements with behaviour and social skills.*
- *Advice regarding giving rewards rather than sanctions to a Year 7 boy - advice for parents - which worked really well.*
- *Learnt about a new resource to manage anxiety in children which was put into effective use with child suffering from anxiety. Anxiety decreased, results of friendships increased, positive comments from child, parents and teacher.*
- *I was concerned about a child who had extremely low self esteem and was very unhappy. Supervision gave me new ideas and new resources and the rest of the group were able to share their experiences. I was able to use all of this to help the child who has become much more confident and more importantly a happier child.*
- *When I had to help some children with the sudden loss of a family member, I felt supported and able to deal with this better which helped both the family and school staff and especially the children.*
- *A case of panic attacks...I'd not come across this before. Laid bare the facts at ELSA meeting and was rewarded with lots of advice. I'm now working on child's self esteem and he is coming into school and working*

well. I was supported by a fellow ELSA phone call to check how I was doing.

- *I borrowed a bullying game from my supervisor which opened up two boys' eyes to their rough play and since then it has decreased.*
- *Our EP told us about some planned sessions she had for some social skills group work which sounded useful in my situation. She said she would send them to me if I emailed her. She was as good as her word and they arrived very quickly and are proving to be very useful.*
- *Last year I was struggling with a child that I was working with - I had done work on self esteem and friendship and was unsure how to progress the work. After a discussion at supervision I tried a circle of friends group with great results. I had not thought to take this approach and was unaware of it but glad I found out about it.*
- *It has helped me with time keeping and organisation of paperwork and resources. I am methodical with my planning. I explore others' websites/resources. I don't dip in and dip out of ELSA - I keep it structured. I keep a sensible workload.*
- *It was suggested that I could use a feelings graph to get a child to open up, this worked very well. I was able to discuss her responses with her mum, which helped the child further.*
- *Working with a child with attachment disorder. Advice from group and EP gave me a clear path to work with the child and to advise other members of staff as to the most effective strategies to provide the best possible help.*
- *I have created a book for one boy with particularly low self esteem, to measure progress against targets on a day to day/activity by activity basis. Breaking targets down so that when the child says "I'm not good at anything" etc we have a tangible record to show him.*