

Year 1 Research Report

“It’s a strategic toolkit.” How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?

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Research Briefing

"It's a strategic toolkit." How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?

The ELSA programme is a tailored intervention designed to support the social emotional and mental health needs of children and young people. It is typically delivered by school support staff trained in relevant psychological theory. As yet, there is a lack of research on how the recent Coronavirus lockdowns have impacted on the way in which ELSA is delivered. This study aims to address this gap in the literature and also explores the support ELSAs themselves receive in their role.

Key findings

Major implications

ELSAs reported an increase in the volume and complexity of their casework post-lockdown; anxiety and social issues were particularly prevalent

- Schools should prioritise pupil wellbeing and the development of social skills over pressures to 'catch up' on missed learning.

Adaptations to ELSA delivery included the length of sessions, overall duration of the intervention and proportion of group sessions

- Schools should implement evaluation measures to monitor the impact of ELSA over time.
- Increased funding is needed to enable schools to fulfil the requirements of the ELSA programme.

ELSAs' reported having a sense of community, emotional support, logistical support and opportunities for skill development were important in facilitating their work

- Wellbeing support should be a regular feature of ELSA supervision.
- ELSAs should receive sufficient development opportunities and protected planning time.

The Research

Background: Recent studies have demonstrated the adverse impacts of Covid-19 on children and young people's wellbeing, including an increase in emotional difficulties (Shum et al., (2021). In addressing these elevated levels of need, interventions which focus on developing pupils' socio-emotional learning, including their emotional regulation and social skills, have been highly advocated (e.g. Yorke et al., 2020). The ELSA programme is one such intervention, which has been associated with reduced anxiety, positive peer relationships and the development of resilience (Krause, Blackwell & Claridge, 2020). Understanding how ELSA has supported the wellbeing of CYP post-lockdown represents a gap in the current literature, which this research seeks to address.

Aims: This study aims to explore ELSAs' perceptions of the predominant SEMH needs of CYP, perceived changes to the nature of their work post-lockdown, the types of support they receive in their ELSA role and whether they perceive certain groups of pupils to be disproportionately likely to be referred for ELSA intervention.

Methodology: A questionnaire, consisting of a mixture of open and closed questions, was completed by 301 ELSAs from across the UK, including those working in primary, secondary and special schools. ELSAs were recruited through providers listed on the ELSA Network website.

Paired interviews were conducted virtually with four ELSAs - two ELSAs from each of two London Authorities.

Participants for both the questionnaire and interviews were asked questions relating to their experiences of delivering the ELSA intervention.

Descriptive analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data and Thematic Analysis of the qualitative data from questionnaires and paired interviews was conducted.

Results: The five main themes from questionnaire data were:

- **Volume and complexity of need** – ELSAs reported an increase in the number of pupils requiring support and the severity of their needs. Anxiety, self-esteem and social skills were most frequently mentioned as areas of concern.
- **Adaptations to ELSA delivery** – The increase in demand necessitated some changes to the way in which the intervention is typically run. These included altering the duration of ELSA input, an increase in group sessions as opposed to one-to-one work and the introduction of additional forms of support, such as lunchtime clubs.

- **Wellbeing support for ELSAs** – ELSAs described the need for a sense of community, including shared experiences with others and feeling as though other staff understood their role. They also needed emotional containment and reassurance.
- **Practical support for ELSAs** – ELSAs spoke of needing protected planning time, which was often felt to be lacking, as well as sufficient resources and opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills, in order to fulfil their role to the best of their ability.
- **Appropriateness of ELSA** – Some ELSAs felt that the intervention was used to fill a gap where other services, such as CAMHS did not have sufficient capacity or as a 'tick box' exercise before additional support was sought.

Similar themes were generated from the paired interview data, with the addition of '**relationships**'. This theme encapsulated the importance of ELSAs knowing their pupils well and facilitating a sense of belonging as well as containment.

Major Implications: Schools should prioritise pupils' mental health and wellbeing over and above the need to catch up on periods of missed learning in order to see the most long-term benefit. A major implication from this research therefore concerns the level of funding allocated to SEMH interventions such as ELSA. If schools are to implement the ELSA intervention effectively, the requirements of programme need to be fulfilled. This includes the need for ELSAs to receive sufficient protected time for planning, delivering and evaluating their sessions, access to appropriate development opportunities and sufficient wellbeing support so as to enable them to effectively support the pupils they work with.

Educational Psychologists are in a strong position to support schools with the implementation of the programme. Firstly, through providing high-quality supervision with opportunities for emotional containment, the sharing of resources and seeking of advice which ELSAs needed and, in some cases, lacked. Secondly, EPs should support ELSAs in ensuring that the casework they receive is within their scope of competence, providing advice and support as necessary if it is not. Finally, EPs should support schools to monitor patterns in their referrals, considering where wider systemic support may be needed for overrepresented groups.

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1: Abstract

This study explores how the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme has been used and adapted to support the Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs of children and young people (CYP) in education settings during and following the UK COVID-19 lockdowns. Additionally, the support ELSAs received within their role was explored. A questionnaire was completed by 301 ELSAs with an additional 4 ELSAs taking part in paired interviews. Thematic Analysis of the questionnaire data identified 5 themes - volume and complexity of need, adaptations to ELSA delivery, wellbeing support for ELSAs, practical support for ELSAs and appropriateness of ELSA. Quantitative questionnaire data was analysed descriptively to provide further information. Thematic Analysis of interview data, conducted separately, identified four themes - impact of COVID, wellbeing support for ELSAs, practical support for ELSAs and relationships. Overall, ELSAs identified an increase in the number of children being referred for support post-lockdown, highlighted the specific needs they presented with - particularly anxiety and social issues – and detailed the adaptations they had made to their practice to manage this level of demand, including adjustments to session length and the introduction of more informal types of support. ELSAs differed in the extent to which they perceived themselves to receive adequate wellbeing support and also highlighted the practical issues surrounding their work, including a lack of time, resources and access to professional development opportunities.

2: Introduction

This study examines the ways in which the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme has been used to support pupils' wellbeing following the recent Coronavirus lockdowns. ELSAs' perceptions of changes to pupils' Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs are explored as well as how ELSAs have adapted their practice in line with

these changes. Furthermore, the level and nature of support received by ELSAs is also investigated.

2.1: The impact of COVID-19 on CYP's mental health

In March 2020, the spread of Coronavirus and resulting lockdown necessitated the wider closing of schools, with only a minority of children invited to attend in person, including those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and those deemed to be 'vulnerable'. Most children engaged exclusively in remote learning during this period and government advice was to stay at home where possible. Further school closures were imposed in early January 2021. Evidently, these restrictions had significant implications for children and young people (CYP), such as a decrease in social interactions with peers, lack of access to outdoor spaces and disruption to the typical routines and structures of life (Cowie and Myers, 2020). A lack of understanding of their new situation combined with exposure to continuous media coverage surrounding the virus exacerbated the level of fear and anxiety of some children further (Dalton, 2020). Other adverse consequences related to the economic hardship many families experienced (Pfefferbaum, 2021) and inappropriate access to the resources required to support children's learning at home (Watts, 2020).

A multitude of research has explored the SEMH repercussions of COVID-19 for CYP. The Co-SPACE Study (COVID-19: Supporting Parents Adolescents and Children during Epidemics), led by Shum et al.(2021), tracked the mental health of CYP aged 4–16 years between March 2020 and July 2021 through monthly surveys completed by parents, carers and secondary-aged young people. In total, over 12,500 parents and 1,300 adolescents in the UK took part. Reports of increased emotional, behavioural, and attentional difficulties, particularly among primary-aged children, were found to coincide with periods when restrictions were at the most stringent. Importantly, CYP from lower income households were found to have higher levels of emotional difficulties, such as feeling unhappy, worried, or

anxious, than those from higher income households, suggesting a disproportionately high effect on those who were already the most disadvantaged. Furthermore, the post-lockdown recovery displayed by most children has not occurred at the same rate for children with SEND and those from low-income households, with these children more likely to continue displaying elevated mental health symptoms. These findings are supported by a systematic literature review by Samji et al. (2021), in which 116 articles comprising data on 127,923 children and adolescents found increases in depressive and anxious symptoms at population level as well as a decline in general mental health compared to pre-pandemic levels. The severity of emotional and anxiety symptoms was found to be higher in 'neurodiverse' populations compared to neurotypical CYP. Again, this suggests the pandemic was experienced differentially by certain groups. Consequently, varying levels of SEMH support are required. One such form of support is the ELSA programme.

2.2: Emotional Literacy and the ELSA programme

Emotional Literacy (EL) is defined as "*the ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions*" (Sharp, 2000, p.8) and research has suggested that good emotional literacy skills are associated with improved mental health outcomes in childhood such as lower internalised symptoms of anxiety and depression (Durlak et al., 2011) and a sense of school belonging, which in turn is associated with improved academic outcomes (Panayiotou, Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2019).

The ELSA programme was developed by Educational Psychologist Sheila Burton in 2001 to meet the growing demand for social and emotional wellbeing support for pupils. Since its inception, the necessity for schools to provide increased mental health support has been recognised in government guidance, such as the 2017 Green Paper: 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health' (DfE, 2017), which set out required provision such as a dedicated Senior Lead for mental health in every setting. The number of local

authorities implementing the ELSA programme has grown in parallel with this increased need and there are now over 130 local authorities providing ELSA training, with EPs typically providing ongoing supervision for ELSAs (Bravery & Harris, 2009).

ELSA training is primarily undertaken by support staff such as Teaching or Learning Support Assistants (ELSA Network, 2021). The training provides knowledge of relevant psychological theory (such as attachment theory) and teaches practical skills across areas such as emotional awareness, self-esteem and social and communication skills (Burton et al, 2009). ELSAs plan and deliver one-to-one or small group sessions, typically on a weekly basis, with the total intervention usually lasting between half a term to a whole term. During these sessions, ELSAs work with CYP towards achieving a set of targets, which are individualised for each pupil based on their specific needs. There should also be a robust process in place within each setting for the referral of CYP (Burton, 2009).

2.3: Research into the impact of ELSA on CYP

Reviews into the impact of ELSA have been conducted by various Educational Psychology Services. For example, Bournemouth EPS gathered the views of ELSAs and headteachers using semi-structured questionnaires (Bravery & Harris, 2009). Overall, ELSA work was viewed as having a positive impact on children's emotional wellbeing, with benefits in terms of relationships, social skills, attendance, behaviour and academic achievement noted.

Positive impacts were also reported by Swindon EPS, who evaluated the programme using questionnaires administered to ELSAs (Denham et al., 2020). The results indicated benefits for children, including improved self-awareness, increased ability to identify emotions and communicate them to others and the development of strategies to manage anxiety.

However, a potential criticism of this type of research is that, in focusing on reports from ELSAs and headteachers, the researchers did not include the voices of the pupils themselves. Mayall (2000) discusses the need for researchers to seek the views of CYP

separately from those of their teachers and parents to avoid the potential for important information being missed. It could be further argued that ELSAs and headteachers, and indeed the LA itself, have a vested interest in presenting a positive appraisal of the programme having invested time, funding and resources into it. This method of evaluation could therefore be seen as lacking the objectivity necessary for a robust and credible impact study. This highlights the need for independent research to be conducted into this area.

More recent studies assessing the effectiveness of the ELSA programme have explored the perceptions of school staff, parents and, importantly, CYP themselves. Krause, Blackwell and Claridge (2020) conducted semi-structured interviews with pupils between the ages of 5 and 16, leading to the identification of five themes related to pupil wellbeing that were linked to ELSA sessions: feelings and emotions, engagement, resilience, hopes and aspirations and relationships. These themes highlighted benefits such as decreased anxiety, increased willingness to attend school, improved school engagement and crucially, resilience, in that pupils reported feeling more able to cope with difficulties and having increased confidence in themselves and their abilities following ELSA input. This perceived impact on resilience echoes reports from head teachers, ELSAs and pupils in studies by Hill et al. (2013) and Hills (2016).

The “relationships” theme in the aforementioned research reflected pupils’ expressions of the positive impact ELSA support had had on their relationships with peers, school staff and family members. The ELSA provided an opportunity for a positive adult relationship in school and a safe space to explore pupils’ feelings. McEwen’s (2019) interviews with ELSAs and primary school children also highlighted the ELSA-child relationship as offering children a safe space to talk openly about their worries and Wong et al.’s (2020) study, described the ‘therapeutic’ relationship with the ELSA as well as the teaching of individualised coping strategies children benefited from. Interviews with parents have also revealed positive perceptions of the programme on their child’s social and emotional development, with skills learned within the sessions often being transferred to the home context (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). This is significant in providing a more systemic

view of wellbeing which goes beyond the effects seen in the school environment (Vailes & Moore, 2021).

Studies using quantitative measures have yielded mixed results in terms of the effectiveness of ELSA support. For example, in Burton, Traill and Norgate's (2010) study, a significant improvement in pupil's EL was recorded in teacher rated scores on the Southampton Emotional Literacy Checklist (Faupe, 2003) but this was not true of pupil ratings. This discrepancy could raise questions about the validity of the qualitative research. However, it is important to recognise that rating scales such as EL checklists are not always sensitive enough to give more than a crude measure of EL and, as such, may not provide the same detail and richness as qualitative methods (Pickering, Lambeth & Woodcock, 2019).

2.4: The role of ELSA in supporting CYP post-lockdown

Whilst multiple studies have explored the mental health implications of the pandemic on children, few studies have looked at the impact on EL specifically. A study by Penfold (2021), using a mixed methods approach did report that a majority of early years practitioners believed the pandemic had impacted on EL, with specific responses related to managing and expressing emotions. However, as this research was conducted on a specific age group (early years), the findings are not readily generalisable to all CYP.

Despite this, much published guidance has highlighted the need for children's SEMH to be put at the forefront of the pandemic response, with the acknowledgement that pupils are not ready to learn if they are not feeling safe and well-regulated. For example, the British Psychological Society publication 'Coronavirus and UK school closures: Support and advice for schools and parents/carers' (BPS, 2020), states that "*psychological wellbeing is paramount ... focusing on [children's] wellbeing and mental health is the priority, rather than educational activities*" (p.4). The guidance also emphasizes the need for adults to "*help*

younger children to understand and label their emotions, and help them to do things that will reduce their stress level” (p.2). This need to understand and label emotions would seem to tie in significantly with the definition of emotional literacy. Indeed, Yorke et al. (2020) stated the need to focus on pupils’ socio-emotional learning (SEL), comprised of emotional regulation, self-efficacy and social skills. They argue that SEL is especially relevant for disadvantaged groups including those with SEND and those from lower-income families to address the inequalities between students.

This emphasis on wellbeing has been reflected in the Wellbeing for Education Return (WfER) initiative developed by the Department for Education (DfE, 2020). The project was aimed at promoting school recovery post-lockdown by allocating funding and training materials to local authorities to empower school staff to support pupils and their families with pressures resulting from the pandemic. These training materials acknowledged that the majority of CYP would display resilience, settling back into school life with minimal difficulty. However, for a minority, additional, targeted support would be needed. Outhwaite and Gulliford (2020) also take this stance, recommending small group and one-to-one support in combination with opportunities for social and emotional learning.

2.5: Support for ELSAs

Support for ELSAs is typically provided through supervision, which provides opportunities for discussing cases, sharing ideas and problem-solving (Osborne & Burton, 2014). Regular group supervision for ELSAs by qualified Educational Psychologists (EPs) is a requirement that is stated on the ELSA Network (2022) as providing *“opportunity for reflective practice, supportive challenge and personal support”*. The guidance acknowledges that, to support the needs of their pupils, an ELSA’s own needs should be addressed and supported through supervision. Furthermore, as per the ELSA Network guidance (2022), another important

function of supervision is to prevent ELSAs being tasked with issues beyond their level of competence, including those that require a degree of specialist professional input.

Osborne and Burton (2014) used a survey to gather the views of ELSAs on their experience of supervision from EPs. Overall, ELSAs perceived a positive impact, including increased understanding of social-emotional development and emotional support for themselves through praise, reassurance and acknowledgment of their role in schools.. France and Billington (2020) also explored the views of ELSAs on group supervision by interviewing five ELSAs, who reflected on the benefits of sharing experiences and the supportive environment created through supervision. Specific comments related to EPs being open to questioning and offering advice and affirmation. For some, a less positive aspect of group supervision pertained to feeling less able to talk through particularly sensitive cases; in these instances, additional one-to-one EP support could be provided.

Though each of these studies was only comprised of ELSAs in one particular county, thus may not be representative of the experiences of ELSAs in general, they provide a useful indication of the potential benefits of supervision. Understanding how these benefits apply to ELSA supervision post-lockdown, in a context where ELSAs may be working with increased or elevated levels of pupil need, will be an important feature of the current research.

2.6: Rationale for the present study

As school closures occurred relatively recently, there is currently a lack of research into how ELSA can be effectively used to support CYP returning to school post-lockdown, and how the intervention may need to be adapted going forward. However, based on the literature outlined above, it would seem that areas adversely affected by the pandemic – particularly resilience, anxiety and relationships - align with those which have been found to be positively impacted by ELSA support. Moreover, Outhwaite and Gulliford's (2020) suggestion that one

to one or one or small group interventions would be needed upon the return to school in order to promote pupils' social and emotional wellbeing also fits in with the principles of ELSA. It would seem to follow that the ELSA intervention could constitute an effective response. Therefore, this study aims to explore how ELSAs can be used to support pupils in schools post-lockdown, by answering the following questions:

1. To what extent do ELSAs perceive pupils' SEMH needs to have changed since the start of the pandemic, if at all?
2. To what extent do ELSAs perceive the nature of their work to have changed following lockdown, if at all?
3. To what extent do ELSAs perceive the pandemic to have impacted on their own wellbeing in their role and what is the nature of the support they receive?
4. What are the characteristics of pupils being referred for ELSA support?

3: Methodology

3.1: Design

Data was collected using two methods - questionnaires and paired interviews – which ran concurrently, as part of a multimethod design. Additional information on the rationale, strengths and limitations of this methodology can be seen in Appendix 1.

3.2: Participants

Questionnaire participants were recruited by emailing a contact for each provider of ELSA listed on the ELSA Network website. The aim was to ensure the largest and most

representative sample possible. In total, 139 ELSA providers were contacted. Of these, 56 agreed to circulate the questionnaire amongst the ELSAs they provide supervision for. These providers represented a geographically diverse range of areas. A total of 304 ELSAs completed the questionnaire. However, 3 of these were removed from the final sample due to not ticking the consent box. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 301 ELSAs. Of these, 201 (66.9%) identified themselves as working in a mainstream primary setting, 57 (18.9%) identified themselves as working in a mainstream secondary setting, 31 (10.3%) identified themselves as working in an 'other' setting such as a Pupil Referral Unit or Pre-school/Early Years provision. The remaining 12 (11.7%) identified themselves as working in a special school. Not all ELSAs who completed the questionnaire had been practising prior to the first lockdown in March 2020 and some were still in the process of completing their ELSA training.

Paired interview participants were recruited opportunistically through two local authorities. The local context of each of the two authorities is outlined in Appendix 6. This meant that the sample, though not necessarily statistically representative of the whole ELSA population, were specifically chosen for ease of access. Information sheets (see Appendix 3) were circulated during ELSA supervision sessions, with ELSAs who wished to participate self-selecting.

Two paired interviews were run, each consisting of a pair of participants - one pair from each of the two local authorities described. Interview 1 consisted of 1 male and 1 female who had both completed their ELSA training prior to the start of the first lockdown. Of these, one worked in a mainstream primary setting and the other worked in a specialist SEMH provision for primary-aged pupils. Interview 2 consisted of 2 female ELSAs, one of whom had qualified within the current academic year and one of whom had qualified prior to the start of the pandemic. One of these ELSAs worked in a mainstream primary setting and the other worked in a mainstream secondary setting.

3.3: Research Tools

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions overall (see Appendix 2) relating to the four research questions. It was hosted on Google Forms and accessed by participants via a clickable link. A mixture of open questions, multiple choice questions and rating questions were used to ensure a good level of detail could be gained.

Paired interviews were run online via Microsoft Teams. Paired interviews held virtually have the advantage of including populations whose participation might otherwise be constrained by time, distance, or other barriers (Murray, 1997). However, the impact on group dynamics of conducting interviews in this way must also be considered, as some of the subtleties of in-person communication may be lost. Despite this, Schneider et al. (2002) argue that video conferencing represents a 'rich media' which does afford participants sufficient opportunity to send and receive cues which enable social conventions such as turn-taking and topic management.

The questions that interview participants were asked to consider are included in Appendix 4. These questions were framed as 'discussion points' and map onto the four research questions with an additional question on the criteria used to refer children for ELSA. The discussion points were deliberately kept quite broad so as not to lead participants to particular conclusions.

3.4: Data analysis

For the questionnaire data, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the multiple choice and rating questions. Analysis of open-ended questions was conducted using Thematic Analysis, following the following the six stages of analysis outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). These are:

- Stage 1 – familiarisation with the data

- Stage 2 - generating initial codes
- Stage 3 – searching for themes
- Stage 4 – reviewing themes
- Stage 5 - defining and naming themes
- Stage 6 – reporting the themes

In this way, constructs were generated inductively from the data. Thematic Analysis was also used to analyse the data gathered during paired interviews by first transcribing the sessions and then analysing their content.

It should be acknowledged that, as analysis of the data was carried out independently by the researcher, there exists a potential for bias in the specific codes and themes generated as data are not coded in an “epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: p. 12). Though this could not be prevented, by providing a table summarising how codes have been grouped into themes and subthemes, the researcher has aimed to provide transparency in the analysis process.

3.5: Ethics

Prior to the collection of data, ethical approval was sought and received from the University College London, Institute of Education ethics committee (see Appendix 5). Furthermore, the research was conducted in line with the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Research Projects.

4: Results

4.1: Questionnaire data

Quantitative data

ELSAs' perceptions of the main areas of pupil need post-lockdown (RQ1)

When asked to select three options from a pre-specified list that describe the types of work they currently support pupils with the most within the ELSA role, the following answers were given by 301 ELSAs.

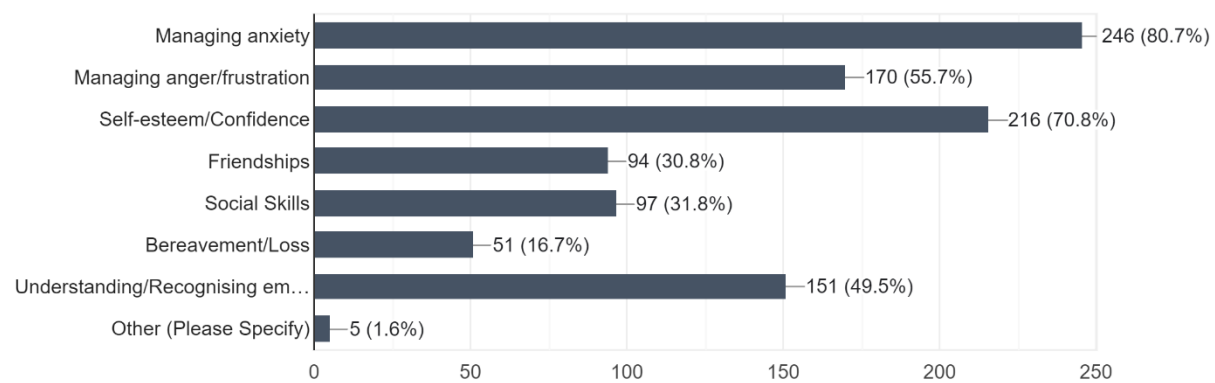


Figure 1: Main areas of need addressed by ELSAs

Supervision received by ELSAs (RQ3)

The 300 ELSAs who answered this question reported receiving supervision from the following people:

Supervision provided by	Number (%) of participants
Educational Psychologist	272 (89.8%)
Other ELSAs	123 (40.6%)
SENCo	130 (42.9%)
Head Teacher	50 (16.5%)
Deputy/ Assistant Head	46 (15.2%)
Head of Year	8 (2.6%)
Other	27 (8.9%)

Table 3: Individuals providing support to ELSAs

Where ELSAs reported receiving supervision from someone ‘other’ than the roles listed above, this tended to be other members of senior leadership or teaching staff. Furthermore, five ELSAs (1.7%) reported not receiving any supervision in their role.

Generally, ELSA sessions were reported to occur between four to six times during the academic year, with support from other professionals such as SENCos occurring more frequently, sometimes in a formal capacity but often on an informal, ad hoc basis.

The areas covered during supervision sessions are displayed below and based on answers from 299 ELSAs.

Areas covered by supervision	Number (%) of participants
Discussion of current ELSA casework	290 (97%)
ELSA wellbeing support	200 (66.9%)
The referral of new casework	173 (57.9%)
Appraisal or ELSA casework	125 (41.8%)
Planning for ELSA sessions	116 (38.8%)
Other	35 (11.7%)

Table 4: The content of supervision received by ELSAs

Where ELSAs' reported 'other' areas covered, this often related to sharing ideas and resources and receiving refresher training in particular topics.

ELSAs' perceptions of the helpfulness of supervision was explored using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing 'not at all helpful' and 10 representing 'extremely helpful'. The graph below summarises the answers provided by 298 ELSAs.

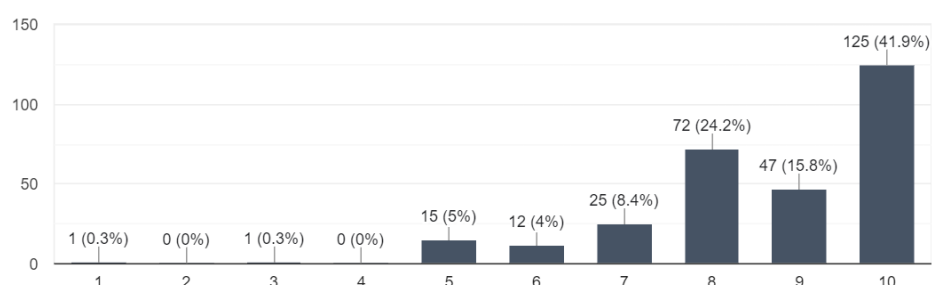


Figure 2: ELSAs' ratings of supervision helpfulness

Characteristics of pupils being referred for ELSA support (RQ4)

Approximately a third of the 277 ELSAs (93) who answered this question did not identify any specific groups of children as being more likely to be referred for ELSA support. Those who did perceive certain groups to be disproportionately more likely to be referred selected Key Stage 2 pupils (74; 26.7%) CYP with SEND (66; 23.8%) and those in receipt of Pupil Premium funding or Free School Meals (53; 19.1%) as being the most likely to be referred.

Qualitative Data

Analysis of the questionnaire data identified five themes:

- Volume and complexity of need
- Adaptations to ELSA delivery
- Wellbeing support for ELSAs

- Practical support for ELSAs
- Appropriateness of ELSA

The table below illustrates the codes identified in the data and how these were categorised into subordinate themes and main themes. These are also captured in the thematic map (Figure 3).

<i>Initial codes</i>	<i>Subordinate themes</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Research Question(s) addressed</i>
Limited opportunities to socialise and play	Missed opportunities	Volume and complexity of need	1, 2, 3, 4
Delayed emotional maturation			
Difficulties accessing home learning			
Concerns around health of themselves and family	Difficulties reintegrating to school life		
Anxiety (general, school-based, separation)			
Difficulties settling back into school rules and routines			
Parental anxiety			
Negative life events e.g. parental separation, bereavement	Family circumstances		
Children living in poverty			
Pressures of COVID on parents			
Increased/decreased duration of ELSA intervention	Structural changes	Adaptations to ELSA delivery	2
Increased/decreased session length			
Increased proportion of group work to one-to-one work			
Additional wellbeing clubs/drop ins	Informal or additional support		
Empowering teaching staff			
ELSA introduced post-lockdown			
Additional ELSAs taken on			
Increased discussion-based activity	Content of sessions		
Less reliance on worksheets			
Shared experiences	Sense of community		
Communication e.g. WhatsApp groups, check ins			
Whole staff understanding of ELSA role			
Reassurance in abilities and decisions	Emotional support		
Opportunities to offload			
Increased confidence			

Protected time for planning and delivery of sessions	Logistical support	Practical support for ELSAs	3
Time to attend supervision			
Adequate resources and funding			
Sharing of resources with other ELSAs	Skill development		
Seeking advice and problem-solving			
Opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD)			
Lack of alternative interventions	Availability of ELSA	Appropriateness of ELSA	1, 2, 4
Box-ticking			
Specified on EHCP			
Lack of capacity of CAMHS	Impact of COVID on other services		
Waiting lists for outside agencies			
ELSA used to relieve pressure of 'difficult' pupils on teachers	Reactive approach to behaviour management		
Teachers unsure of how to support pupils			

Table 1: Themes identified from questionnaire data

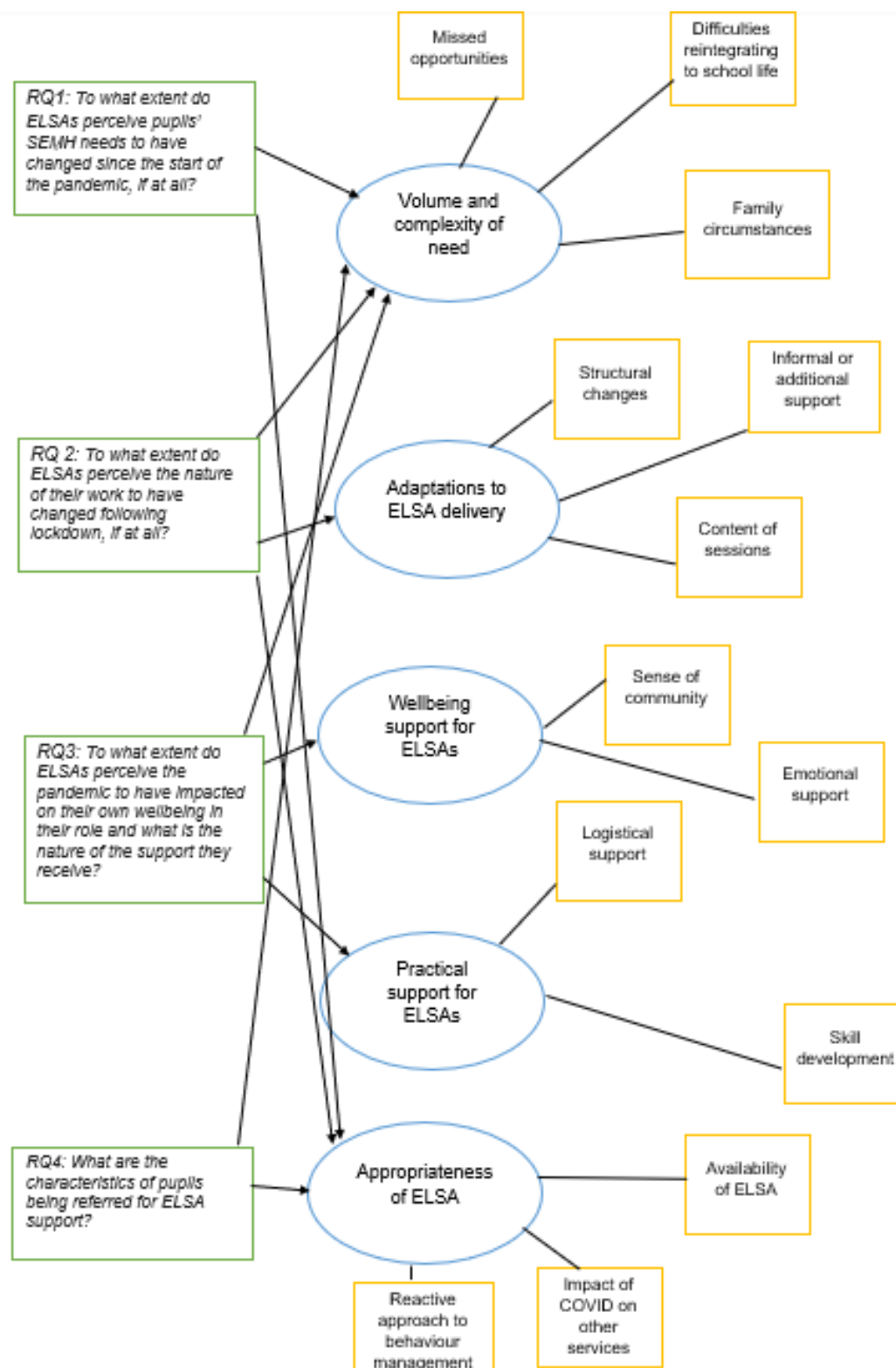


Figure 3: Thematic map of questionnaire data

4.2: Theme 1 - Volume and complexity of need

In analysing the data, it became apparent that the specific SEMH needs ELSAs mentioned as being predominant currently were very similar to those that they felt were present prior to the start of the pandemic, though the prevalence of each particular need had changed, with mentions of anxiety, friendships and social problems and bereavement approximately doubling. Content analysis was used in this case to compare the number of mentions of each specific need made by ELSAs relating to the children they work with currently compared to before the first lockdown. These numbers are summarised in Table 2 below.

Presenting SEMH need	Number of mentions relating to present	Number of mentions relating to pre-lockdown
Anxiety (general)	188	91
Low self-esteem/confidence	111	76
Social/friendship issues	117	66
Anger	76	57
Difficulty understanding/regulating emotions	65	37
Resilience	26	16
Bereavement	43	20
Separation anxiety	25	7
School-based anxiety/attendance difficulties	23	2
Family issues	26	23
Behavioural concerns	32	20
Self-harm	24	8
Trauma	6	9
Depression/low mood	15	3
Other		
- Sleep issues	6	0
- Eating issues	5	0
- Exam/work stress	7	1
- Parental anxiety	3	0

Table 2: SEMH needs mentioned by ELSAs currently versus pre-lockdown

Whilst the above findings provide an interesting picture, it should be noted that ELSAs retrospectively recalling the issues that were prevalent pre-pandemic may promote questions of reliability. Therefore, these figures should be viewed cautiously.

Overall, ELSAs' perceived that, while the specific SEMH needs CYP are presenting with have not necessarily changed significantly, more pupils are requiring ELSA support and their needs are often more complex. One ELSA shared, "*There are several different things instead of just one thing. So they might [previously] just have friendship issues but now they have anxiety and self-esteem as well.*"

'Missed opportunities' emerged as a subordinate theme as ELSAs commented on how aspects of CYP's development, particularly their social skills, had been adversely impacted by lockdowns and periods of home learning. One ELSA summarised, "*For many students time stood still for two years but school ages and expected development ploughed on regardless.*" ELSA's answers to this question also reflected the fact that these missed opportunities had impacted on self-esteem for some CYP, who felt that they had "*fallen behind*" during home learning or were "*not good enough*" upon the return to school.

ELSAs commented on specific issues children were experiencing upon the return to school following the COVID lockdowns. These included concerns around themselves or their family members becoming ill, difficulties in settling back into school life and routines having spent prolonged periods of time at home and difficulty separating from parents and carers. "*Parental anxiety*" was also mentioned by several ELSAs as having increased post-lockdown.

ELSAs also spoke of the personal circumstances which many pupils had to contend with, which had been exacerbated by lockdowns. This included CYP's experience of negative life events such as bereavement or domestic abuse and implications for the amount of time and attention parents were able to provide whilst working from home.

4.3: Theme 2 - Adaptations to ELSA delivery

Whilst there were a number of ELSAs who reported that there had not been significant changes to their working practices since the first lockdown - and a portion of respondents

who had only begun practicing as an ELSA after the pandemic - there were still many respondents who did report changes to the nature of their work following lockdown.

In some cases, the duration of ELSA intervention had been increased as CYP's needs were felt to be more complex and, as such, required prolonged support over and above the typical duration of ELSA involvement (*"...the issues since lockdown are unable to be addressed and resolved in 6 weeks. I am dealing with lots of anxiety/ low self-esteem issues, friendship problems ..."*). Conversely, other ELSAs reported needing to cut down on the duration of time spent with each child in order to be able to fit in all the children on their caseload. *"Waiting lists"* were mentioned by several ELSAs as being brought in or increasing in length following the first lockdown. A similar picture was apparent in relation to the length of individual sessions; although most ELSAs reported that the length of sessions was unchanged, there were a few cases in which sessions had been lengthened to allow children more time and some where they had been shortened to fit more children in. An increase in the amount of group work was also reported as another means of coping with the increased number of referrals. Changes to staffing reported included additional ELSAs being taken on following the pandemic to support with the increase in number of referrals and, for a significant portion of the ELSAs in this study, implementation of the ELSA intervention within their setting had only arisen following or as a direct result of the pandemic.

There were repeated mentions of ELSAs feeling the need to provide additional support above and beyond taking on more casework. This resulted in some ELSAs offering more informal types of support, including the introduction of lunchtime and after school clubs, informal check ins or drop-in sessions and ELSAs providing informal support for teachers. For example, *"I now run a lunchtime wellbeing club, 2 lunchtimes a week... I was worried there were so many children that needed support that we...were completely missing."*

Some ELSAs also reported changes in how the content of sessions is delivered to pupils. Examples of this included more games to facilitate pupil engagement and more talking or discussion-based activities, rather than worksheet-based activities.

4.4: Theme 3 – Wellbeing support for ELSAs

Wellbeing support for ELSAs was comprised of two subthemes. ‘Sense of community’ reflects the importance of ELSAs being able to connect with those who had shared experiences and to have ongoing channels of communication, both through supervision and via other means such as social media. ELSAs also described the importance of all staff understanding the nature of their role and expressed frustration when they felt this did not occur.

The second subtheme, ‘emotional support’ incorporates sentiments around being able to “*offload*”, share concerns and gain reassurance and confidence in their own skills and the work that they do with pupils; *“It’s useful to talk about what is going on, even if people cannot provide clear cut solutions. The emotional burden of working with children with mental health can be heavy, so being able to share that load is relieving”*. There was a sense that the increased concerns around CYP following the pandemic had taken an emotional toll on ELSAs’ own wellbeing. For example, one ELSA commented, *“Sometimes it can be challenging to support the children and keep a happy and positive disposition... their anxiety and sadness touches me.”*

In addition to the formal support that ELSAs are provided through supervision, many also spoke of more informal opportunities they valued, such as checking in with members of senior leadership, teachers or other ELSAs as and when needed.

The extent to which ELSAs felt they had been provided with adequate wellbeing support appeared to vary significantly, with some expressing that they felt well-supported, whilst others suggested more needed to be done. For some, the support that they received was felt to focus more on the practical aspects of the role and did not provide enough opportunity for the ELSAs themselves to consider their own feelings. For example, *“My SENCO meetings are always so rushed: progress of current cases and who can come off*

ELSA? Which new referrals have we got?... We have very efficient meetings and they are useful, but sometimes I'm left feeling what about me?"

4.5: Theme 4 – Practical support for ELSAs

The 'logistical support' subtheme refers to the conditions ELSAs felt were necessary to enable them to manage their workload effectively. For example, having protected planning time, sufficient resources and a designated budget. In some cases, the demands of the role led to ELSAs feeling as though their planning was rushed. One ELSA described feeling as though *"sometimes the sheer scale of your workload might make you feel that the time would have been better spent working with the pupils instead of at supervision"*.

The second subtheme, 'skill development', relates to ELSAs benefitting from access to continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, including courses in topics relating to the specific needs of CYP they support. ELSAs also described the impact of supervision on developing competency in their role through being able to share resources, gain advice and engage in joint problem-solving activities.

Again, ELSAs differed in the amount of practical support they perceived themselves as receiving.

4.6: Theme 5 – Appropriateness of ELSA

This theme reflects comments from some ELSAs about how the intervention can be seen as the only means of support or, at the very least one, that is readily available within the school. For some, there seemed to be a question over the appropriateness of ELSA for particular children and a feeling that ELSA support had been requested due to a lack of any suitable alternatives. For example, *"Difficulties with behaviour in school are often referred to ELSA as*

a 'quick fix' option when there is no other help available. Intervention from EP, CAMHS and PFSA is getting harder to access as waiting lists increase....” There were also several mentions of children receiving ELSA support because it had been specified on their EHCP. Within this theme, there was mention of the referral of certain children feeling tokenistic or like a “box ticking” exercise. As one ELSA put it, *“ELSA is used as we have to be seen to be going through the motions before a referral for a child who clearly needs more expert help gets it. This does not help the child and takes up valuable ELSA places.”*.

Another subtheme here related to the use of ELSAs to “mop up” or “babysit” CYP whose behaviour teachers struggled to manage. There was a sense of frustration around ELSA being used in this way, with one ELSA commenting, *“Teachers and TAs have come to expect ELSAs to take the difficult children away- I assume that their own stress levels have been exacerbated because of COVID”*.

Illustrative quotes for all five themes are captured in Appendix 7 Table 1.

4.8: Paired interviews

Qualitative data from the paired interviews led to the identification of four themes:

- Impact of COVID
- Wellbeing support for ELSAs
- Practical support for ELSAs
- Relationships

The table below illustrates the codes and subthemes that were used to develop these themes.

<i>Initial codes</i>	<i>Subordinate themes</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Research Question(s) addressed</i>
Separation anxiety	Emotional regulation	Impact of COVID	1, 2, 4
Parental anxiety			
Need for control			
Anger			
Lack of socialisation	Missed opportunities		
Lack of typical educational opportunities			
Being ‘cooped up’			
Maintaining friendships	Social skills		
Cooperating with others			
Understanding social cues			
Feeling low about themselves	Self-esteem		
Lack of confidence			
Celebrating successes	Sense of community	Wellbeing support for ELSAs	2,3
Opportunities to check in with others			
Whole staff understanding of ELSA role			
ELSA events e.g. fairs			
Reassurance from senior leadership	Emotional support		
Opportunities to offload			
Need for protected planning and reflection time	Logistical support	Practical support for ELSAs	1,2,3
Sufficient time to attend supervision/network meetings			
Sharing resources and ideas	Skill development		
ELSA events			
Group problem-solving			
Visiting other ELSAs’ settings (pre-COVID)			
Building trust	Facilitating connection	Relationships	
Knowing children well			
Promoting a sense of belonging			
Providing follow-ups and check ins	Facilitating containment		
Promoting a sense of safety			

Table 5: Themes identified from paired interview data

As several of the themes identified in the paired interview data are similar or identical to those from the questionnaire data, in the interests of space, these themes will not be elaborated on further here but representative quotes are included in Appendix 7, Table 2.

'Relationships' was a new theme arising from this data and is considered in more detail below.

4.9: Theme 4 – Relationships

Three out of four ELSAs spoke of the relationship they had built with the pupils they worked with and reflected on how these relationships had been conducive to facilitating positive outcomes for these pupils. The subtheme 'facilitating connection' reflects ELSAs feeling able to build a sense of trust with pupils and instill a sense of belonging by *"trying to make them part of our family"*. One ELSA, who provides a significant level of teaching cover within the school, shared *"I'm good at this because I know every pupil in the school because I go and teach everywhere."* The second subtheme, 'facilitating containment', reflects the ways ELSAs reported promoting a sense of safety and security for pupils, such as providing brief check-ins where needed. One ELSA reflected, *"Being able to build that rapport with a child makes such a difference. That way even when your formal sessions have come to an end they know that there is that person they can come to if they need it."*

Further illustrative quotes from paired interviews are displayed in Appendix 7, Table 2.

5: Discussion

5.1: Summary of findings

RQ1: To what extent do ELSAs perceive pupils' SEMH needs to have changed since the start of the pandemic, if at all?

One of the key themes mentioned by numerous ELSAs was the rise in the number of referrals they had been receiving since the first lockdown and an enhancement in the complexity of these cases. This was felt to be due to various factors, including a lack of developmental opportunities whilst CYP were learning at home and implications of children's personal circumstances, including poverty and bereavement. Anxiety was listed as a main area of need by eighty percent of questionnaire respondents, and this seemed to take various forms, including school-based anxiety, separation anxiety and children's anxiety relating to concerns about themselves or their family members becoming unwell. Many ELSAs felt that CYP returning to school post-lockdown lacked the social skills to successfully navigate peer relationships, resulting in more friendship issues and less harmonious peer relationships. The self-esteem of some children also seems to have been adversely impacted, with some feeling that home learning has left them 'behind'. It would also seem that for a portion, the transition back into school routines and rules following periods of home learning has been challenging. Overall, the pandemic appears to have impacted on children's ability to effectively regulate their emotions and cope with change, summarised by ELSAs as a lack of 'resilience'. In line with the research outlined in section 2.1, these findings are perhaps unsurprising.

RQ2: To what extent do ELSAs perceive the nature of their work to have changed following lockdown, if at all?

Various means of coping with the level of demand reported by ELSAs have been implemented, and these have varied by setting. For some, structural changes to sessions have been made, such as alterations to individual session length as well as the overall duration of ELSA support. An increase in the proportion of group work compared to one-to-one sessions was also reported by a significant portion of ELSAs. There seemed to be a tension between the increased amount of support individual pupils were perceived to require and the need to work with as many pupils as possible. There were also numerous mentions

of ELSAs needing to resort to more informal types of support in order to “catch” as many CYP as possible, including those who may not present as being in obvious need of support. Interestingly, a large number of ELSAs reported that the intervention had only been introduced to their setting post-lockdown or, if already in place, had been implemented on a larger scale with additional ELSAs being trained.

RQ3: To what extent do ELSAs perceive the pandemic to have impacted on their own wellbeing in their role and what is the nature of the support they receive?

ELSAs’ responses to questions around support provided an interesting picture; in many cases, ELSAs did report feeling as though they had been well-supported with their work, both on a practical level as well as from a wellbeing perspective. For these ELSAs, having opportunities to share information and resources and seek reassurance about their role was highly appreciated and supports the findings of previous research, such as that of Osborne and Burton (2014). However, this was not the case for all ELSAs and a variety of constraints around accessing support were reported, such as a lack of protected time for planning and delivery of sessions, a lack of budget or other resources and not enough access to CPD opportunities, such as courses that would help to improve their knowledge of particular topics (for example, grief) that were felt to be increasingly pertinent following lockdowns. A small number of ELSAs reported difficulties in attending supervision sessions due to their volume of casework. There were also a portion of ELSAs who felt as though they did not have enough wellbeing support for themselves in relation to the emotionally-demanding nature of the work that they conduct. In the questionnaire, approximately two-thirds of ELSAs reported wellbeing support for themselves forming part of their supervision, suggesting that for a third of these ELSAs, this aspect of support did not feature. As well as the formal forms of support they had access to, many also sought additional support through catchups with staff on an ad hoc basis or through participation in social media groups where they could connect with other ELSAs. This suggests that the formal support ELSAs receive

in terms of supervision may not be sufficient alone. On a positive note, most ELSAs did regard supervision as being helpful, with approximately four-fifths of questionnaire respondents rating its helpfulness between eight or above on a scale of one to ten.

RQ4: What are the characteristics of pupils being referred for ELSA support?

A third of the ELSAs questioned did not feel that particular groups of children were any more likely to be referred for the intervention than others. However, those that did often put this down to the impact that COVID had on children of a particular age or developmental stage. For example, children in Key Stage 2 were identified by some as having their self-esteem disproportionately impacted by periods of lockdown. Children with SEND and those in receipt of Pupil Premium Funding or Free school Meals were identified as being disproportionately likely to be referred for ELSA support by approximately a quarter and a fifth of respondents respectively. This fits in with previous findings relating to the impact of COVID (e.g. Samji et al., 2021).

The appropriateness of the intervention for certain children was called into question by some ELSAs, who pointed out a perceived lack of alternative support for pupils whose needs require a higher level of intervention. ELSAs also expressed frustration at the way other staff members understood their role, for example, as removing disruptive pupils from class.

5.2: Strengths and limitations of the current study

This study has addressed a gap in the current ELSA literature by exploring how the intervention has been used to support CYP in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, following periods of wider school closures and home learning. Some interesting and important findings have been raised by drawing on the words of ELSAs themselves.

Furthermore, using a multimethod approach has enabled the generation of both rich, qualitative data and ‘hard’ quantitative data, strengthening the robustness of the research.

A key limitation relates to the small number of paired interview participants. Only four ELSAs took part in paired interviews and these ELSAs represented just two areas in London. ELSAs also differed regarding their qualification status and the types of setting they worked in. Therefore, the themes identified from these paired interviews are unlikely to be generalisable to the wider ELSA population. However, many of the themes apparent in the paired interview data also heavily link in with those generated from the questionnaire, completed by over 300 ELSAs from a range of areas within the UK. The relatively large sample size for the questionnaire indicates a fair level of reliability for these themes. However, a drawback of this method was that not all participants answered every question and, without the opportunity to explain or rephrase particular questions, some misunderstandings were evident through participants’ answers. Furthermore, the level of detail questionnaire participants provided varied considerably. Due to the nature of this method, it was not possible to provide further prompting to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants’ responses. Therefore, it would be valuable for future research in this area to employ alternative methods such as semi-structured interviews in order to gain a fuller understanding of participants’ experiences.

5.3: Implications for practice

A key implication of this research relates to the increasing demand ELSAs perceived following the first lockdown. Many ELSAs reported fulfilling multiple roles within their settings, thus being unable to focus exclusively on their ELSA work. This often led to a sense of ELSAs being pulled in different directions and needing to relinquish some of their ELSA time in the face of other priorities, such as providing teaching cover. The resulting lack of ELSA capacity has, in some cases, led to CYP being placed on long waiting lists before

receiving the intervention, adversely impacting on the ability of schools to provide timely support to pupils who need it. In other cases, schools have managed demand through reducing the duration of ELSA input to individual pupils. Ultimately, this is likely to impact on both the long-term efficacy of the intervention and on ELSAs' ability to form relationships with CYP – a central element of the intervention as highlighted by both the paired interview participants in this study and by Burton (2018), who asserts that the ELSA-child relationship is at the core of ELSA work.

Consequently, the adaptations made to ELSAs' delivery of the programme in light of the pandemic will need to be carefully monitored over time. Drawing on the principles of implementation science (the study of how evidence-based practice can be incorporated into routine practice), simply training school staff as ELSAs will not be sufficient to ensure positive outcomes for CYP; the way in which the programme is implemented and supported (and the resources available to do so) will determine its long-term effectiveness (Tansella & Thornicroft, 2018). Additionally, for an intervention to be legitimately referred to as 'ELSA', there are certain criteria that must be met (as discussed in section 2.2). These relate, for example, to the length and nature of ELSA involvement and are outlined in the ELSA trainer's manual (Burton, 2009). Therefore, schools will need to take care that any changes made to the delivery of the programme do not deviate so far from this guidance as to compromise the veracity of the intervention.

Further exploration of ELSAs' experiences highlighted additional implications for how the ELSA intervention is implemented and managed within settings.

Firstly, ensuring robust wellbeing support for ELSAs is vital given the demanding and often emotionally-charged nature of their work, especially during the present times. The benefits of supervision ELSAs mentioned tied in with those reported by Osborne and Burton (2014), particularly in terms of EPs providing emotional containment, which facilitated ELSAs' ability to provide emotionally containing relationships for their pupils. As EPs are one of the main providers of ELSA supervision, it is important for them to ensure that this aspect of supervision sessions is given adequate time and emphasis. EPs should also work

with school senior leadership to ensure additional support systems are in place for ELSAs, providing regular opportunities for check-ins and the sharing of advice.

Secondly, in order for ELSAs to fulfil the requirements of the intervention and support pupils as best they can, their work needs to be carefully planned and tailored. As such, it is essential that they have protected time and space to do so as well as regular opportunities to access the CPD necessary to provide them with the knowledge and skills they require. This requirement has been highlighted through previous research, such as that of McEwen (2019).

Furthermore, there should be processes in place in all settings for ensuring that all staff have a shared understanding of the ELSA programme and how it should - and should not - be used (ELSA Network, 2022). This information could be shared via staff meetings at the beginning of the school year, highlighting the areas that ELSAs have been trained in and the types of support they can offer. Where school staff do not have a solid grasp of the programme, this can lead to inappropriate referrals being made (Eldred, 2021).

In considering referrals to the programme, it is also necessary to consider the type of support required on a case-by-case basis. Some ELSAs' responses to the questionnaire indicated that the increased demand for wellbeing support for CYP coupled with cuts to mental health services has led to ELSA being increasingly being used by schools to fill the gap where higher-level support, such as counselling or CAMHS involvement, is needed. This ties in with Eldred's (2021) finding that some ELSA referrals relating to CYP who had experienced domestic abuse were felt by EPs to be inappropriate but occurred due a lack of alternative support available. From an ethical perspective, ELSAs should not be taking on casework which falls outside the boundaries of their role and competence (Burton, 2009). Again, an important component of the EP role is to work with ELSAs to ensure that the casework they undertake is within their remit and to signpost when more specialist support is required (Burton, 2009).

Finally, a further role of the EP is to promote a systemic perspective (Pellegrini, 2009). EPs should encourage schools to look at patterns in their ELSA referrals and to

consider whether certain groups of pupils are disproportionately likely to be referred for support. Where particular groups are identified, it is necessary to consider why this is the case and whether more could be done at a whole-school level to support these CYP.

5.4: Wider implications

Each of the implications outlined above would suggest that increased funding to support the implementation of ELSA – and SEMH interventions in schools more generally - is much-needed. However, this highlights a longstanding issue relating to the national context of financial instability, with real-term budget cuts for schools evident (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2022). This tension between the need for increased SEMH funding and the current financial climate provides a key consideration in terms of how school funds should be allocated.

Since the first lockdown, a dominant narrative perpetuated by the government has focused on the perceived need for pupils to catch-up on periods of missed learning, with recent discussions centring around the possibility of lengthening the school day - specifically lesson times to - achieve this (Watt, 2021). The costs associated with this are reported to be ‘moderate’ according to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2021), and evidence on the effectiveness of longer school days on pupil performance is ‘mixed’ (Chartered College of Teaching, 2021). Moreover, the BPS (2020) has argued that the impacts of the pandemic on mental health, combined with a perceived increase in academic pressure stemming from this ‘catch-up narrative’ has the potential to further exacerbate the negative impact on CYP’s wellbeing. Given the large proportion of ELSAs in this study who commented on the detrimental impact of the pandemic on pupils’ self-esteem (and linked this to pupils’ perception of being left behind academically) alleviating the focus on attainment and focusing on wellbeing is arguably more important.

Likewise, responses from ELSAs in this study tie in with previous assertions from Outhwaite and Gulliford (2020), highlighting the need to focus on developing CYP’s social

and emotional skills post-lockdown as opposed to purely academic learning. As much of children's socialisation and regulation skills have been found to develop through play - and good social skills are associated with desirable long-term outcomes such as improved mental health (Segrin & Taylor, 2007) - this should also be an important consideration when decisions are made regarding school timetables, including the length of children's break times, which has also been a contentious issue in recent years (Baines, Blatchford & Golding, 2020). As evident through the previously-mentioned BPS publication (2020), EPs are well-placed to promote these messages to schools, drawing on psychological theory to encourage evidence-based practice.

5.5: Conclusion

The present research suggests that the ELSA programme is a highly-utilised intervention, which has been implemented by an increasing number of settings since the start of the pandemic. Based on the responses from ELSAs in the study, the programme has the potential to provide effective wellbeing support to CYP. However, in coping with the increased demand and complexity of cases, settings have needed to carefully consider how ELSA is delivered, and this has not been straightforward. For the best results to be obtained, the intervention needs to be supported by adequate funding so as to ensure the requirements of the programme can be met.

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7: Appendices

7.1: Appendix 1 – Methodology supporting information

Questionnaires allow for a large amount of data to be gathered in a relatively short space of time. Whilst there are some drawbacks of using questionnaires, such as the possibility of questions being misinterpreted by respondents as well as a potential low response rate (Jones, Murphy, Edwards & James, 2008), a mixture of open and closed questions could be used, enabling the collection of quantitative, more focused information as well as qualitative, more detailed information.

Paired interviews are a type of focus group that have often been conducted by researchers to familiarise themselves with novel research areas before developing questionnaire measures (Converse & Presser, 1986). As COVID-19 represents an unprecedented phenomenon and its impact on the work of ELSAs has not yet been largely researched, the kinds of issues that were likely to be most significant to participants were not readily apparent. As such, the use of paired interviews was felt to be an effective means of gaining an insight into the types of issues or topics that were likely to be prevalent for ELSAs. However, due to time constraints associated with data collection, the present study was designed such that paired interviews ran concurrently alongside questionnaires. Paired interviews bring together participants from an area of interest and are useful in enabling researchers to acquire a deeper understanding of participant experience (Krueger, 2014). The researcher facilitates a group discussion between the participants through which knowledge of the topic is collectively co-constructed (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). The benefit of this method is in the rich experiential data that can be generated from the group dynamics as opposed to questioning single participants in isolation (Carey & Asbury, 2016).). A potential drawback may be that participants do not voice their views as freely as they might individually, instead resorting to the opinion of the group as a whole, resulting in 'groupthink'

(Dreachslin, 1999). A solution to this issue involved running paired interviews using pairs of participants, which meant that there was no 'majority' viewpoint for participants to defect to.

7.2: Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?

My name is Imogen Chandler and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am currently undertaking research on how the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme has been used to support children and young people following the COVID-19 lockdowns. As there has not yet been much research into this area, your participation will provide an invaluable insight.

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Areas covered will include:

- Pupils' social emotional mental health needs
- The types of pupils who access ELSA support
- The nature of ELSA work
- The support received by ELSAs in their role

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary and participants do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with. You can stop at any time without explanation. If, after completing the questionnaire, you do not want your data to be included you will need to contact the researcher within 7 days of completion. If you choose to withdraw, your data will not be included in the final report.

What will happen to my data?

The data gathered from questionnaires will be analysed and used in the final report. All data will be stored securely in line with the UCL guidelines (below) and will be deleted in July 2024. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to the data. All data will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable in the final report or any subsequent publications.

If you are unsure of any of the information above or have any further questions, please email them to Imogen.chandler.21@ucl.ac.uk.

Please tick the box below if you are happy to participate in the questionnaire.

- I have read and understood the information and give my consent to participate in the questionnaire.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. This information is explained fully in the UCL Research Participant Privacy Notice, which you can access here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice>

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Questionnaire questions

1. What type of setting do you work in?
 - Mainstream primary
 - Mainstream secondary
 - Special school (please specify the age groups of the pupils you conduct ELSA work with)

 - Other (please specify)

2. Within your setting, is there a set of criteria for referring pupils for ELSA support? If yes, please give details
 - Yes _____
 - No
 - Don't know

3. To the best of your knowledge, have the criteria for referring pupils for ELSA support changed since the first lockdown? If yes, please give details.
 - Yes _____
 - No
 - Don't know/not applicable

4. Approximately how many hours a week do you typically spend on each of the following types of ELSA work?

1:1 Work _____
Group Work _____
Whole-class ELSA _____
Other (Please specify) _____

5. Approximately how many hours a week did you spend on each of the following types of ELSA work prior to first lockdown?

1:1 Work _____
Group Work _____
Whole-class ELSA _____
Other (Please specify) _____
I was not conducting ELSA work prior to March 2020

6. What was the approximate duration of your most recent ELSA case?

- ☐ Less than half a term
- ☐ Approximately half a term
- ☐ More than half a term but less than a whole term
- ☐ Approximately a term
- ☐ More than a term
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

7. Is this similar to the typical duration of casework prior to the first lockdown? If no, please give details

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No _____
- ☐ Don't know/not applicable

8. What is the typical duration of a single ELSA session in your setting?

- ☐ Less than 15 mins
- ☐ 15-30 mins
- ☐ 30-45 mins
- ☐ 45-60 mins
- ☐ 60+ minutes

9. To what extent was this similar prior to the start of the first lockdown?

10. What are the predominant Social Emotional Mental Health concerns that you are currently aware of among children in your setting? (Please give as much detail as possible).

11. What were the predominant Social Emotional Mental Health concerns among children in your setting prior to the first lockdown? (Please give as much detail as possible).

12. Which 3 main areas do you currently support pupils with the most in your ELSA role?

- ☐ Managing anxiety
- ☐ Managing anger/frustration
- ☐ Self-esteem/Confidence
- ☐ Friendships
- ☐ Social Skills
- ☐ Bereavement/Loss
- ☐ Understanding/Recognising emotions
- ☐ Other (Please Specify) _____

13. Please describe any other significant changes to the types of ELSA work you conduct with pupils in your setting since the first lockdown.

14. How often do you receive supervision from the following people, if at all:

- ☐ Educational Psychologist _____
- ☐ Head teacher _____
- ☐ Deputy/Assistant Head _____
- ☐ SENCo _____
- ☐ Head of Year _____
- ☐ Other ELSAs _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____
- ☐ I do not receive supervision in this role

15. What does this supervision consist of? (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Discussion of current ELSA work
- ☐ The referral of new ELSA cases
- ☐ Planning for ELSA sessions
- ☐ Appraisal of previous or ongoing ELSA work
- ☐ Wellbeing support for yourself

16. On a scale of 1-10, how helpful do you find supervision? (1= not at all helpful, 10= the most helpful)

Why have you selected this rating?

17. Please describe any other types of support you receive in your ELSA role and its impact on your wellbeing and practice.

18. Do you have any further comments about the types of support you receive or would like to receive?

19. Do you perceive any of the following groups of pupils to be overrepresented in ELSA referrals/support currently? (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Girls
 - ☐ Boys
 - ☐ Early years
 - ☐ Key Stage 1
 - ☐ Key Stage 2
 - ☐ Key Stage 3
 - ☐ Key Stage 4
 - ☐ Pupil premium/Free school meals
 - ☐ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
-

☐ Not applicable

20. If yes, why do you feel these pupils are more likely to be referred for ELSA support as opposed to other types of support or intervention? Please give details.

7.3: Appendix 3 – Information sheet for paired interviews

How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?

Information sheet for paired interview participants

My name is Imogen Chandler and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am currently undertaking research on how the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme has been used to support children and young people following the COVID-19 lockdowns. As part of this research, I am running some paired interviews to find out about the experiences of ELSAs in both primary and secondary schools and what support they are currently providing for children and young people.

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me at Imogen.chandler.21@ucl.ac.uk if there is anything else you would like to know.

What is involved in the research?

Participants will take part in a paired interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Groups will take place online and involve a small number of ELSAs discussing a series of questions. This will include questions relating to pupils' social emotional mental health needs, the types of work ELSAs engage in and the support received by ELSAs in their role. The group will be facilitated by me and will be recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary and participants do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with. You can withdraw from the group at any time without explanation. All data will be anonymised. If you withdraw from the study your data will not be included in the final report.

What will happen to my data?

The data gathered from paired interviews will be analysed and themes will be identified. The final report will include quotes from the paired interviews. However, all data will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable in the final report or any subsequent publications. Data will be stored securely in line with the UCL guidelines and will be deleted in July 2024 upon the completion of my training. Only the myself and my research supervisor will have access to the data.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete the following consent form and return to Imogen.chandler.21@ucl.ac.uk by Monday 20th 2022. Please also indicate in your reply which days/times would be most convenient for you to take part in an online paired interview.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Data Protection Privacy Notice The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. This information is explained fully in the UCL Research Participant Privacy Notice, which you can access here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice>

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Consent form

(please tick to confirm)

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I consent to my participation being audio/video recorded.

☐ I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

☐ I agree to keep all matters discussed in the paired interview meeting confidential and will not share details of anything that is discussed

Name of participant

Date

Signature

7.4: Appendix 4 – Paired interview questions

Interview questions

N.B: Prior to starting, remind ELSAs that any names and details mentioned during the discussion should remain confidential.

- 1. Discussion point: What are the predominant Social Emotional Mental Health needs among children you currently work with in your role as an ELSA?**
 - (Optional follow-up) To what extent have these changed since before the pandemic?

- 2. Discussion point: What common characteristics do you perceive there to be among pupils who are referred for ELSA support, if any?**
 - (Optional follow-up) Why do you feel these pupils are likely to be referred for ELSA support as opposed to other types of support or intervention?

- 3. Discussion point: What is the nature of the ELSA work you currently engage in? (e.g. particular issues/topic areas, proportion of 1:1 vs group work, length of ELSA intervention)**
 - (Optional follow-up) To what extent has this changed since before the pandemic, if at all?

- 4. Discussion point: What criteria are in place in your setting for referring children for ELSA support?**
 - (Optional follow-up) To what extent has this changed since before the pandemic, if at all?

- 5. Discussion point: What kinds of support do you receive in your role as ELSA?**
 - (Optional follow-up) What is the type, frequency, duration and provider of this support?
 - (Optional follow-up) What impact do you feel this support has had on your wellbeing and ELSA practice?

7.5: Appendix 5 – Ethics form

Ethics Application Form: Student Research

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research or contact your supervisor.

Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s).

Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1: Project Details

- a) Project title: [How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant \(ELSA\) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?](#)
- b) Student name: [Imogen Chandler](#)
- c) Supervisor/Personal Tutor: [Ed Baines](#)
- d) Department: [Psychology and Human Development](#)
- e) Course category (tick one):
 - PhD/MPhil ☐
 - EdD ☐
 - MRes ☐
 - DEdPsy ☒
 - MTeach ☐
 - MA/MSc ☐

ITE ☐

Diploma (state which) ☐ Enter text

Other (state which) ☐ Enter text

- f) Course/module title: [DDYEDUSCAP01 Year 1 Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology 2021/2022](#)
- g) If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed: [N/A](#)
- h) Intended research start date: [March 2022](#)
- i) Intended research end date: [July 2022](#)
- j) Country fieldwork will be conducted in: [England](#)

If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: [UCL travel advice webpage](#)

- k) Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes ☐

External Committee Name: Enter text

Date of Approval: Enter text

No ☒ **go to Section 2**

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☐ Interviews

☒ Paired interviews

☒ Questionnaires

- ☐ Action Research
- ☐ Observation
- ☒ Literature Review
- ☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
- ☐ Use of personal records
- ☐ Systematic review – **if only method used go to Section 5**
- ☐ Secondary data analysis – **if *secondary analysis used go to Section 6***
- ☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
- ☐ Other, give details:

Research in the context of COVID-19

This research comes under IOE category 1a – COVID-19 restrictions have been removed in England.

Data collection will take place via online questionnaires and paired interviews so face to face contact will not be necessary.

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore how the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme can be used to support children and young people in schools following the COVID-19 lockdowns, by drawing on the experiences of ELSAs.

The main research questions are:

1. To what extent do ELSAs perceive pupils' SEMH needs to have changed since the start of the pandemic, if at all?
2. To what extent do ELSAs perceive the nature of their work to have changed following lockdown, if at all?
3. To what extent do ELSAs perceive the pandemic to have impacted on their own wellbeing in their role and what is the nature of the support they receive?
4. What are the characteristics of pupils being referred for ELSA support?

Design and participants:

- ELSAs from a particular local authority in London will be invited to take part in online paired interviews.
- Questionnaires will be circulated to ELSAs more widely through the ELSA network.

Due to time constraints, these two methods of data collection will run concurrently.

Sampling: Opportunity sampling will be used by contacting Educational Psychologists who supervise ELSAs and asking them to circulate details of the study.

Data collection: Questions will focus on:

- Pupils' social emotional mental health needs
- The types of pupils who access ELSA support
- The nature of ELSA work
- The support received by ELSAs in their role

Reporting and Dissemination: The reporting and distribution of findings will be in accordance with UCL guidelines. The final report and any subsequent publications will contain anonymised quotations from participants as well as statistics gathered from questionnaires.

Section 3 – research Participants (tick all that apply)

- a) Will your research involve human participants?

Yes ☒

No ☐ (if 'No', go to Section 4)

- b) Who are the participants for this project (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply

☐ Early years/pre-school

☐ Ages 5-11

☐ Ages 12-16

☐ Young people aged 17-18

☒ Adults please specify below

☐ Unknown – specify below

☐ No participants

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC).

- c) If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study? *(Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures - see Section 9)*

N/A

- d) How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)?

Paired interview participants to be recruited through a particular local authority - information sheets to be distributed by Educational Psychologists during ELSA supervision groups.

Questionnaire participants to be recruited through the ELSA network – emails will be sent to all ELSA supervisors listed on the ELSA network website requesting them to circulate the questionnaire to the ELSAs they supervise.

- e) Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing

Information sheets will be circulated to participants describing the purpose of the study and what is involved.

- f) How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?

Participants will provide written consent before taking part in the study. The consent form will inform them of their right to withdraw at any time. This will also be stated following paired interviews and upon completion of the questionnaires.

- g) **Studies involving questionnaires:** will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer?

Yes ☒

No* ☐

***If no**, please explain why below, and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in Section 8

Enter text

- h) **Studies involving observation:** please confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed

Yes ☐

No* ☐

***If no**, read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8

Enter text

- i) Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort, or embarrassment as a result of your study?

Yes* ☒

No* ☐

***If yes**, what steps will you take to explain and minimise this?

Participants will be made aware that they are not obligated to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable with and will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants will be assured that all data will be anonymous and treated confidentially.

***If no**, explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise?

Enter text

- j) Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way?

Yes* ☐

No ☒

If yes, please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in Section 8

Enter text

- k) Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?

Yes ☒

No* ☐

***If no**, please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8

Enter text

- l) Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing)

Yes ☒

No* ☐

If no, why not?

Enter text

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

- a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?
Yes* ☐ No ☒
- b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?
Yes* ☐ No ☒
- c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?
Yes* ☐ No ☒

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

- a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?
Yes* ☐ No ☐
- b. Will you be analysing any secondary data?
Yes* ☐ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 10 Attachments**.*

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a. Name of dataset/s:

b. Owner of dataset/s:

c. Are the data in the public domain?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

g. **If no**, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments**.*

Section 7 – Data storage and security

a) Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the General Data Protection Registration (GDPR). (See the [Guidelines](#) and the *Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy* for more detail.)

Yes ☒

b) Will personal data be processed or be sent outside of the European Economic Area (EEA)?

Yes* ☐

No ☒

***If yes**, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below

Enter text

- c) Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups, and during transcription?

Imogen Chandler, Ed Baines

During the research

- d) Where will the data be stored?

On a password protected laptop. Questionnaire data will also be stored in an online survey platform (e.g. Google Forms).

- e) Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used?

Yes ☒

No ☐

***If yes**, state what mobile devices will be used

Laptop (password protected)

After the research

- f) Where will the data be stored?

On UCL OneDrive.

- g) How long will the data and records be kept for, and in what format?

In its raw form until July 2024

- h) Will the data be archived for use by other researchers?

Yes ☐

No ☒

***If yes**, please provide details

Enter text

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these below.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply from the below.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited through local authorities participating in the ELSA programme. However, it will be made clear that participation is not mandatory and participants are free to withdraw at any time without explanation.

Informed consent: Participants will be provided with information sheets outlining the aims of the research and what will be involved. The email address of the researcher will be provided and participants will be encouraged to ask any questions they may have to ensure they are fully informed before giving their consent.

Confidentiality/anonymity: All data will be kept confidential and data included in the final report and any subsequent publications will be anonymised such that participants from

paired interviews cannot be recognised. I will not be collecting personal details from questionnaire participants and will not be sending them the questionnaire directly so will not know who this data has come from. Confidentiality will only be breached in the event of a safeguarding issue being raised.

Data Storage: Data will be kept on a password protected laptop and stored in line with UCL's data protection policy.

Sensitive topics: Questions around participants' wellbeing and the SEMH concerns of pupils they work with may be sensitive. However, participants will be informed that they do not have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable with and can withdraw at any time without explanation.

Enter text

Section 9 – Further information

Outline any other information you feel is relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary

Enter text

Section 10 – Attachments

Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached:

- a) Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters
Yes ☒ No ☐ N/A ☐
- b) Consent form
Yes ☒ No ☐ N/A ☐
- c) The proposal for the project
Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☒
- d) Approval Letter from external Research Ethics Committee
Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☒

e) Full risk assessment

Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☒

Section 11 – Declaration

I have read, understood, and will abide by the following set of guidelines:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Please select guidelines this project will be abiding by:

BPS ☒

BERA ☐

BSA ☐

Other (please state) ☐

I have discussed the ethics issues relation to my research with my supervisor

Yes ☒ No ☐

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course

Yes ☒ No ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project

Name: [Imogen Chandler](#)

Date: [11/03/2022](#)

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the

guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name: Imogen Chandler

Course: DDYEDUSCAP01 Year 1 Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology 2021/2022

Project Title: How can the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme be used to support children and young people post-lockdown?

Reviewer 1

Supervisor name: Ed Baines

Supervisor comments: I am happy to agree to this research

Supervisor/first reviewer signature: Ed Baines

Date: 16/3/22

Reviewer 2

Advisory committee/course team member name: Chris Clarke

Advisory committee/course team member comments:

The ethics forms suggest Imogen has worked diligently to make sure all ethical issues have been considered. I am happy to agree this research.

Advisory committee/course team member signature:



Date: 01.04.2022

Decision on behalf of reviewers

Approved ☐

Referred back to applicant and supervisor ☐

Referred to the REC for review ☐

Recording

Recorded in the student information system ☐

Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the relevant programme administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee website

7.6: Appendix 6 – Local contexts of ELSAs participating in paired interviews

The paired interviews drew upon the experiences of ELSAs from two local authorities where ELSA work is highly utilised, across both primary and secondary schools. ELSA provision is managed through the Educational Psychology Service, where EPs provide ELSA training and supervision.

The first local authority, in South-West London, has approximately 130 ELSAs. This local authority has 44 primary, nine secondary and five special schools. According to LG Inform (2021), the percentage of children identified as having SEN is slightly higher than the national average. In the academic year 2020/2021, SEMH was identified as the primary need for 18.1 % of primary-aged children with SEN and 26.1% of secondary-aged children. In both cases, this is higher than the average rate across London. The child poverty rate is 36% in this authority (Trust for London, 2022).

The second local authority, in North London, has around 50 trained ELSAs. This authority has 87 primary, 27 secondary and six special schools. According to LG Inform (2021), the percentage of children identified as having SEN is slightly lower than the national average. In the academic year 2020/2021, SEMH was identified as the primary need for 17.2% of primary-aged children with SEN, slightly lower than the national average, and 23.8% of secondary-aged children with SEN, slightly higher than the national average. The child poverty rate in this local authority is 37% (Trust for London, 2022).

7.7: Appendix 7: Illustrative quotes from thematic analysis

Table 1 Quotes illustrating the five themes from questionnaire responses

Theme	Illustrative quotes
<p>1. Volume and complexity of need</p> <p>1a. Missed opportunities</p> <p>1b. Difficulties reintegrating to school life</p> <p>1c. Family circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The majority [of concerns] were the same before, we just have more children identified as needing ELSA support.</i> • <i>The issues [before lockdown] were less intense</i> • <i>There are several different things instead of just one thing. So they might just have friendship issues but now they have anxiety and self-esteem add to it as well.</i> • <i>Post lockdown, there are just more children requiring support than previously.</i> • <i>The amount of pupils needing supporting has increased, a lot of very anxious pupils, finding it difficult to communicating and be around large social settings/school communal spaces.</i> • <i>Some of our very young children have missed out on the very basics that they need to build on. When School re-opened this was a very stressful time for some of them, we are now seeing a lot of younger children with attachment difficulties.</i> • <i>SEND children have been out of the school routine and become less independent, also they have become reliant on technical devices resulting in poorer face to face communication skills with their peers.</i> • <i>I feel that children in primary missed out on critical stages of social and emotional development and ended up spending extra time at home.</i> • <i>Some of the children's emotional abilities to show resilience and form meaningful friendships/relationships have regressed.</i> • <i>Lack of social and interpersonal skills with early years children who have missed nursery etc due to lockdown. Limited awareness of social norms, how to make and maintain friendships without getting frustrated or cross and hurting others.</i> • <i>We are also seeing more playtime incidents as some of the younger children have not developed their social skills.</i> • <i>If they were unable to access online learning and [have] fallen behind this is affecting their self-esteem.</i> • <i>Feeling of hopelessness, anxiety, overthinking things like what if me or my family get COVID and die.</i> • <i>Worries around death [are] more predominant now.</i> • <i>Separation anxiety, after having a significant amount of time at home during the lockdowns, coming into school has become a challenge for some.</i> • <i>Lockdown and post COVID, some students too scared to reintegrate...worries over family and friends, bereavement from losing family friends or knowing of people who have lost loved ones.</i> • <i>We had a few cases of loss from COVID which made some children and families anxious about sending their children back to school. Some of our children due to the loss in their families, didn't attend school for a long time after schools had re opened. Due to anxiety parents had over sending their children back when cases were so high.</i> • <i>School refusal has had a big increase since lockdown. Pupils feel like they can be their own teachers, therefore do not want to come to school.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our current Yr2s (6-7yr olds) any have spent so much time with their families in their homes during lockdown, that some have found the school timetable and 'rules' around appropriate behaviour harder to cope with. • The amount of SEN children who have struggled with the constant changes and adaptations have given us a few generations of concerns. • We are also in an area of deprivation and children have suffered greater levels of abuse, financial difficulties and harm at home which is clearly having a major impact. • Lots of bereaved children or parents who have split up • Self-harm/ anxiety/ low self-esteem/ children that are in care/ children that have been exposed to adult themes/ domestic violence/ death in the family/ suicide and murder in the family/ parents separating. • Many of our needs are based on attention and a lack of it at home. Some of the children I work with come from large families and so do not get a lot of 1-1 time with parents. This did become more apparent following lockdown.
<p>2. Adaptations to ELSA delivery</p> <p>2a. Structural changes</p> <p>2b. Informal or additional support</p> <p>2c. Content of sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before lockdown I could guarantee every 1:1 slot was 20mins and each group 45mins. Due to the high demand some 1:1 slots are now 15mins and groups tend to be around 30mins. • Used to be 30 mins, but asked to reduce to 20 mins so more children can be seen. However I have found this to be quite challenging. • My ELSA time was cut by 10 mins a child post lockdown and planning cut down from 30 minutes per child to 10 minutes per child. • I feel that the issues since lock down are unable to be addressed and resolved in 6 weeks. I am dealing with lots of anxiety/ low self esteem issues, friendship problems, trusting in their own thoughts... • No. I tend to be working with each individual for much longer than the usual 6-8 sessions. • Prior to lockdown it was easier to round up sessions to around 6 weeks now we are having to extend it. • Prior to the first lockdown I was mainly working 1:1 then after lockdown mainly group work • I tend to spend same amount of time but with a group of children as opposed to individual children • With the increased need we have had to move to group ELSA/nurture time to ensure that pupils do not have to wait a long time for support. • Yes, not much different, ELSA's have increased within our school so more members of staff have been taken on to support • We had an ELSA in school after lockdown, didn't have one before • We did not have ELSA practitioners before the first lockdown • As a school we have needed to train another ELSA to keep up with the demand, since lockdown. • I now run a lunchtime well being club, 2 lunchtimes a week. Its just a casual drop in club that children can come to do nice activities and have a bit of a chat if they want to... I suggested it as I was worried there were so many children that needed support that we either couldn't give ELSA to because there wasn't room or because they didn't fit the criteria, or that there might be children that needed support but we were completely missing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I run informal wellbeing sessions to catch as many children as possible who need it most that day and because of the caseload.</i> • <i>We have had an influx of referrals, the school has had to make wellbeing boxes for each class so they have access to some emotional support before they see me.</i> • <i>Supporting staff support children, providing strategies and resources.</i> • <i>More ELSA by stealth in classrooms</i> • <i>I run an after school ELSA club for students that don't see me during the day but need that extra support.</i> • <i>I have supported teachers not in my class/bubble to support their children needing ELSA</i> • <i>I do more active listening and less structured sessions as it's difficult to get the children to engage.</i> • <i>More casual and building relationships with pupils rather than set structure. Children are more wanting to have the talking therapy element to ELSA, rather than worksheets etc.</i> • <i>I run more social skills groups, circle of friends groups and Lego therapy groups than before lockdown.</i>
<p>3. Wellbeing support for ELSAs</p> <p>3a. Sense of community</p> <p>3b. Emotional support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A problem shared... The support of others, a feeling of a community.</i> • <i>I am a member of ELSA groups on social media, which is great for ideas for sessions and advice.</i> • <i>ELSA support website and my own reading and research on self-care, mental health and wellbeing</i> • <i>In our ELSA group we have our own WhatsApp and it is there for support.</i> • <i>I follow the ELSA Support and ELSA Support and Wellbeing pages on Social Media.</i> • <i>Sometimes it's hard doing ELSA sessions but speaking to others and knowing they are in the same boat is reassuring.</i> • <i>I often feel I'm just bumbling along. It's so reassuring to know others are doing similar to me.</i> • <i>I would really like my whole school to understand ELSA as feel some members of staff are quite ignorant to it or just haven't had the time to fully understand what it is so could be incorporating more in class themselves.</i> • <i>I don't think some members of staff realise they impact the role has on our emotions and wellbeing.</i> • <i>I wish I received more support. Having children day in, day out coming to talk about their problems big or small; takes an emotional toll. Counsellors often receive counselling themselves to help them keep their head above water, and I think ELSAs can be in a similar position.</i> • <i>I feel that we are not always supported in school well enough when dealing with very draining issues.</i> • <i>I feel I receive very little support for my own well being. I do not feel we are highly valued by senior leaders and I am not asked how the sessions are developing. I feel we are under appreciated.</i> • <i>Our school overall is very supportive so I feel that my wellbeing is also supported.</i> • <i>I work with another ELSA and we support each other emotionally and with our work load.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I can speak to my headteacher. It help me to share things if I have had something difficult to deal with.</i> • <i>It can be very overwhelming with the severity of some of the cases so knowing I am doing the right thing or that more experienced people struggle helps put it all into context.</i> • <i>Supervision gives us a great opportunity to "offload" any concerns or worries we may have & also to get reassurance that what we are doing in ELSA sessions is right.</i> •
4. Practical support for ELSAs 4a. Logistical support 4b. Skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I would like to receive protected ELSA time, planning time and a budget.</i> • <i>I have been an ELSA for approximately six years now and feel that some more targeted or additional training would be beneficial. For example, self-harm and mental health training or an introduction to CBT.</i> • <i>I am the only Elsa in our School so would like another member of staff to help with the caseload</i> • <i>Sometimes have found it overwhelming. I wish there was more time to prepare more fully for the sessions sometimes.</i> • <i>EP supervision is helpful but not long enough sometimes if you have a bigger issue as you share it with other ELSAs.</i> • <i>It is very helpful, but sometimes I struggle to fit it in.</i> • <i>Sometimes the sheer scale of your workload might make you feel that the time would have been better spent working with the pupils instead of at supervision especially if there is no set focus for training in the session and it just feels like a social catch up (although there is a place for that as well)</i> • <i>Discussing cases with others to bounce off ideas is invaluable. Discussing issues with Ed Psych is a must. Having the link and network to call upon is really helpful.</i> • <i>They give a different perspective and are able to offer suggestions that I haven't thought of.</i> • <i>It's always good to run things past other people. The ELSA Supervision I always look forward to - great to get other tips from other ELSA's & to share resources.</i> <i>It is good to meet with the Ed Psych and other ELSAs to discuss individual cases and gain different perspectives on children's problems. The Ed Psych supervision often includes further training information and new techniques. The supervision sessions are a vital support.</i> • <i>The ELSA supervision sessions are extremely helpful in that we discuss current cases, strategies that have helped, strategies that could help, share best practice and resources and generally discussed ways to improve our practice within school.</i>
5. Appropriateness of ELSA 5a. Availability of ELSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ELSA sometimes seen as the only intervention by teachers.</i> • <i>Box ticking when teachers have run out of ideas with special needs children.</i> • <i>I think sometimes the school likes to look like they've tried various interventions even if they may not be completely relevant.</i> • <i>Children who are looked after receive ELSA support as a given whether or not it is needed</i> • <i>There is not much support for children and therefore it goes to ELSA work.</i> • <i>In some cases, the school needs to be offering some form of support and ELSA is an option for fulfilling this requirement.</i>

5b. Impact on COVID on other services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Other adults in school do not know what support to offer the child. They do not have the time or understanding to deal with the child themselves confidently.</i> • <i>SEN are referred due to it being on EHCP plan often due to emotional social needs although may not always be necessary.</i> • <i>More complex cases due to the capacity of CAMHS</i> • <i>Cases generally are taking longer and ELSA skills based intervention is not always what is needed. Due to the backlog at CAMHS, more parents are reaching out for support and we have also noticed an increase in parental anxiety.</i> • <i>Now have a waiting list for children in school due to waiting time to be seen by outside agencies.</i> • <i>What I have found is that some of these children have found it harder to transition back to school life- I would argue that school could have done more to reduce their anxieties by providing a more supportive package upon their return and not rely on the ELSA to 'mop up'.</i>
5c. Reactive approach to behaviour management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I would also argue that teachers and TA's have come to expect ELSA's to take the difficult children away- I assume that their own stress levels have been exacerbated because of COVID.</i>

Table 2 Quotes illustrating the four themes from paired interviews

Theme	Illustrative quotes
1. Impact of COVID 1a. Emotional regulation 1b. Missed opportunities 1c. Social skills 1d. Self-esteem	<p><i>"We're working on circle of control. How she can control things and her self-esteem and working on them, the anger issues, what are triggers for her anger?"</i></p> <p><i>"She builds her anxiety more, which is fed by the mum who talks about anxiety... when I called the mum to talk about some of the problems and the mum just knew way, way, way too much than she should do about anxiety worries for young people, so obviously it's, it's been bothering them."</i></p> <p><i>"Obviously with COVID and all that as well... if they've been cooped up, it's just....trying to get back to normal life for them. It's like, they've not even been given a chance at school."</i></p> <p><i>"A lot of our children struggle with social cues, social skills, making friends, making reciprocal friendships. And that is a big struggle for all of them."</i></p> <p><i>"We have such young children that haven't socialised for so long"</i></p> <p><i>"I would say all three of them do struggle with friendships. You know they have friends, but I wouldn't say that if you again, if you had to rank your children on how friendly and, and.. you know how well they play together nicely you would say they were in the lower quartile of.. of... of being able to maintain and cooperate with friendship groups."</i></p> <p><i>"If you had to rank your pupils of confidence to least confident they would be in the lower quartile of confidence."</i></p> <p><i>"Just to reemphasize that everybody loves her and wants the best for her, even though she's finding it tricky. And then from that, our next sessions we working on self-esteem."</i></p>
2. Wellbeing support for ELSAs	<p><i>"It's good to, sort of, hear from other people, erm, and hear the different experiences from people as well, cause, like, when it's like</i></p>

<p>2a. Sense of community</p> <p>2b. Emotional support</p>	<p><i>'aah, I don't know what to do with this child' someone who's done it a lot longer or even someone who's done it for a year might have a really good idea."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers need to understand that this is not a reward program for badly behaved children - it's a strategic toolkit to help them think about problems and create solutions".</i></p> <p><i>"What I found was there was more...I'd get the children that people didn't want in their class. Giving them [teachers] a bit of respite, that's was what it was for."</i></p> <p><i>"I think communication within the school is really important, so I've not yet had a chance to tell the teaching assistants who are effectively my colleagues about the program. I've told the teachers but haven't had a chance to tell the TAs."</i></p> <p><i>"I can go to my SENCo anytime. She is always there. She's always supportive. She will always say to me, just check your wellbeing first before, you know, you have any problems".</i></p> <p><i>"If I was to ring a parent and that situation would then be tricky, I know that my SENCo would then get involved and support me with that."</i></p>
<p>3. Practical support for ELSAs</p> <p>3a. Logistical support</p> <p>3b. Skill development</p>	<p><i>"I'm not given enough time to plan. I get half an hour for each of the girls. And that's it. To plan and write up the notes and get everything ready. But I have asked for them for next year when they do my timetable, I said I do need more than half an hour because, you know, obviously the program is supposed to be planned and strategic."</i></p> <p><i>"There's just so many competing demands. A lot of us ELSAs, we do other roles within the school too, you know? And if there's staffing issues or an incident, it often will get taken out of our planning time and often we won't get that time back."</i></p> <p><i>"My school gives me time to attend the network meetings and the supervision sessions, which obviously are important because that's where you get to share new knowledge with the EP service or with other ELSAs".</i></p> <p><i>"It's good to come together and like, share resources and stuff like that well. So, it does help. A lot."</i></p> <p><i>"Being able to share resources is a big plus. It's not always easy to get exactly what you want unless you make it yourself but there's often someone who will have come across something as part of their work so in that we can build a bank of resources we all draw from."</i></p> <p><i>"Before we did it so we was like jumping around the schools so we could see different ELSAs' areas and stuff like that...The thing is at the moment with the groups, there are only a few of us in each. So it's kind of like, a bit weird, yeah. But it's like once every half term".</i></p>
<p>4. Relationships</p> <p>4a. Facilitating connection</p> <p>4b. Facilitating containment</p>	<p><i>"I'm good at this because I know every pupil in the school because I go and teach everywhere."</i></p> <p><i>"The SENCo...has a more overall picture, but she would know all the children really well and the parents because she's been doing it for a long time".</i></p> <p><i>"And obviously where we sort of get... we have assessment places as well, so that we get children could be here with us full time while they get their EHCP or could leave us after a few weeks. So it's like...they don't know whether they're coming or going so it's like, trying to make them part of our family and then if they are to go giving them skills to go and make that again, you know what I mean?"</i></p>