

Supporting Trainees With SEND

Introduction

As well as equipping trainees to effectively support the needs of pupils with SEND, it is vital that trainees who might have a special need themselves are also supported. In the case of a disability, it also a legal requirement, under the Equality Act 2010, that reasonable adjustments are made to remove barriers that prevent an individual from full participation. In addition to strategies that support specific needs, there are also general strategies that should be considered. These should be considered both in terms of the strategic management of a course and its delegates and also the interactions and resources that are provided for them. A useful starting point is to remember that many of the strategies that are used for pupils will also benefit adult learners too. Similarly, there is often overlap between the needs that support strategies can be used for.

General Considerations

- Ensure that information about what support is available for trainees and how they can access it is readily available. Doing this will enable trainees to be independent and to have ownership of any support that they require. In addition, it would be useful for trainers to acquaint themselves with this information, as it will enable them to signpost trainees to it.
- The trainees themselves may know what works for them in terms of support and strategies, so it is important to provide opportunities to gather this feedback and then consider ways in which it can be acted upon. This can be done as part of the evaluation feedback for the programme as well as when having conversations with trainees about what support they may need.
- Some students will inform you that they have a particular need or disability. If they inform you of a particular diagnosis e.g. dyslexia, autism etc. you should still ask about what they might struggle with and what strategies help them as each trainee will have individual needs that sit under the overarching label.
- Proactively consider the use of different approaches and methods for the delivery of taught content within the programme e.g. provide opportunities for discussions, include collaborative group activities and so on.
- Consider different ways in which trainees can present their learning for assessment or to demonstrate their learning on an ongoing basis. Some courses, for example, have trainees design posters on particular topics, the content of which they give a presentation on, rather than producing a written narrative.
- If possible, any taught sessions could be recorded to give trainees the opportunity to review whole sessions or parts of sessions which they were unsure about, at their own pace.
- Some trainees may require support to be able to organise themselves and manage their time effectively. Taking time to address these skills would not only help those trainees with a special need but possibly others too.

Mental Health Needs

- It is important here to remember that any support given in this area, particularly if there is a more serious mental health need, will be limited as your focus will be on encouraging the trainee to seek professional support, if that is needed. The Samaritans provide a service that is always available and Mind, the mental health charity (<https://www.mind.org.uk/>), offer individuals support and advice. You could also encourage the trainee to talk to family members or to seek the support of their GP.

- It is important to follow any safeguarding and wellbeing policies in place if you are concerned that a trainee may be at risk of harming themselves and to seek support from senior colleagues.
- An essential step is to create an ethos of openness and caring. This will reassure delegates that they can approach a tutor with any concerns or needs that they might have and that they will be listened to.
- Active, or non-judgemental listening, is an important element of support. Some of the basics of this include:
 - Ensuring that when talking with a trainee about their needs, the space is private, to ensure confidentiality, and that you won't be disturbed e.g. mute phones.
 - Maintaining open body language as this will help the trainee to feel at ease e.g. keep your hands on your lap rather than crossing arms which can indicate defensiveness or discomfort about what is being said.
 - Sitting sideways on to the trainee will make the situation feel more comfortable and less intense.
 - Use open questions to encourage the trainee to talk and then allow time for them to respond
 - It can help to repeat back to the trainee what they have said to clarify that you have understood correctly what they have told you.
 - Try not to show any negative judgements e.g. through tone of voice, facial expressions, body language etc.
- Remember, the issue that a trainee wants to talk about may just be the result of having a particularly bad day and they just feel the need to offload rather than to go through possible solutions to any issues or to seek further support and advice.
- Following a conversation, check in with trainees to check how they are doing and whether things have improved.
- You may wish to consider undertaking specific training designed to raise awareness of mental health needs and to help you support trainees. There are various organisations which provide this sort of training including Mental Health First Aid England (<https://mhfaengland.org/>).

Dyslexia

- Utilising the in-built accessibility features of software can be of great benefit. Microsoft Office 365, which is used in many schools, has a variety of accessibility features which are included as standard. These include:
 - Text to speech - this where words can be dictated to the computer and then appear as text e.g. in a Word document
 - Speech to Text – this feature will read text out loud to the user; this also works with website content when using the Microsoft Edge internet browser (Google Chrome has a range of free 'add ons' that will make searching for and accessing pages on the web, easier for someone with a literacy difficulty).
 - Subtitles – if presenting using PowerPoint, this feature will make subtitles from what the presenter is saying, in real time. This is useful if a trainee struggles with processing auditory information.
 - Immersive reader – this feature includes a number of elements including being able to change the onscreen background colour of a document and a 'line focus' tool that focuses on a selected section of a page e.g. in a Word document.
- Microsoft Lens is a standalone piece of software that, after a user 'scans' (takes a photograph of) a written document, will convert it into typed, editable text. This means that the features described above can be used to help the trainee access it.

- Encourage trainees to use a smart phone, tablet or even a laptop that has a camera, to take a photo of any information or instructions that they need to make a note of to prevent having to write them down or type them out.
- When presenting written information ensure that the font being used is at least size 12 and sans serif as this will help to make the text clearer and more accessible.
 - sans means 'without' and serifs are the small lines or strokes that usually appear at the end of a letter e.g. Times New Roman is serif font; consider the same words written in the sans serif font Calibri - Times New Roman.
- Consider presenting information visually when possible or supplementing written information with a visual prompt.
- Present written information in a clear and uncluttered format e.g. using bullet points and subheadings to break up text and avoiding unnecessary images that don't supplement the information being given.
- Strategic use of colour to highlight certain points or to group the different elements of a concept together, can be useful for some people with dyslexia as it not only makes text more accessible but it can help them to form links between different bits of information.
- Encourage trainees to use the spell check facility available in all word processing software before submitting any written work to trainers or using resources designed for pupils (the text to speech facility is another way that spelling can be checked and it will also help the trainee to identify text that contains grammatical errors).

Autism

- Keep language as clear as possible and avoid the use of idioms. If using humour, an explanation of the joke, or that that is what you were doing, can be helpful. Always avoid sarcasm.
- When instructions are being presented, it is helpful to break them down into smaller steps. If they are being presented in written form, as for dyslexia, it can be useful if the trainee takes a photograph of them so that they can record them without having to write them down.
- Regarding instructions, it is worth checking back with the trainee to make sure that they have understood what is required. This is also the case where feedback on progress and points for development are given.
- Routine and structure can be very important to an individual with autism and so where there are planned changes to routines, trainees should be advised of these in advance as well as being given when possible.
- Visual prompts can be particularly useful to supplement written information and to provide structure and focus for more open-ended activities such as discussions. For example, where specific questions are the focus of a discussion, have the questions displayed and/or provide a task sheet.
- When using groups for activities, prompts may be needed to encourage the individual to join in. Depending on the confidence and needs of the trainee, this could be presented as a suggestion e.g. You can join this group because they are one short? To something more direct such as 'I would like you to join this group please'.
- Having a learning environment that is well organised can help to make a trainee feel calmer and therefore ready to engage with the session.