

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants - Working Requirements and Guidelines

These guidelines are to help headteachers, ELSA managers and the ELSAs themselves deliver the best possible support within their schools and to indicate the essential and desirable conditions to facilitate that. It is particularly important that these are considered as the trainee ELSA moves from the taught element of their year-long training towards qualified practice.

Following the taught element of ELSA training, the following are minimum requirements for maintaining the title of 'Emotional Literacy Support Assistant' (qualified or trainee). Annual re-registration can only occur on the basis of these criteria having been met in the preceding year. Trainee ELSAs cannot pass their training year without these criteria having been met.

The ELSA must:

1. attend the 6-day ELSA training course and following this, attendance at 4 supervision sessions in order to attain ELSA qualification. Missed training days or supervision sessions will need to be attended at a later date. Attendance at the training days and all supervision sessions must be 'face-to-face' rather than remote, unless otherwise specified by the EP trainer/supervisor.
2. be able to run **weekly** sessions with the pupils referred for this work.
3. have a minimum of one day a week (5 hours) protected time for carrying out their ELSA work, although this might be less in a small school of 100 pupils or fewer (time should still be no less than 2.5 hours per week) and is highly likely to be more in larger schools and where the level of need warrants more ELSA support.
4. attend and participate in the termly ELSA supervision sessions (2-2.5 hours apiece). This amounts to 6x supervision sessions per year. Attendance at these supervision sessions must be 'face-to-face' rather than remote, unless otherwise specified by the EP supervisor.
5. **Note that it is not possible for other school personnel to observe ELSA supervision sessions.** These allow a safe, reflective and reflexive space for ELSAs to discuss their practice, in the context of trusting supervisor/supervisee and peer relationships, which would be undermined by external observers. Additionally, information discussed during supervision is confidential to the group of ELSAs and supervising EP.
6. **If an ELSA chooses to discontinue attending supervision meetings or has difficulty attending because of their other responsibilities, they will be assumed to be no longer functioning in an ELSA role and their name will be removed from the register of county approved ELSAs.** It is the responsibility of the ELSA's line manager to ensure that the ELSA has sufficient release time to attend the required supervision sessions.
7. spend some of their allocated time in school:
 - liaising with relevant school staff, preparing their involvement and drawing up a brief written plan,
 - putting together necessary resources,
 - keeping brief records of the work done in a session and the outcomes achieved.

The following are also recommended:

- ELSA work is confidential and also needs to happen in a quiet, uninterrupted space. Where the use of a dedicated room will not be possible in all cases, public spaces (corridors, the library etc.) must be avoided.

- Whilst a 'face to face' ELSA session might take up to 40 minutes, an hour should be allocated per pupil to allow for the above-mentioned planning, preparation and recording etc.
- Referrals to the ELSA should come via the ELSA's manager or a designated person (such as the SENCo). There should be a process in school for requesting consideration of a pupil for ELSA work.
- ELSA's are trained to deliver a programme of support to children and young people in their schools identified as experiencing additional emotional needs. It is the responsibility of the line manager, ideally in consultation with class teachers, ELSAs, HOY and SENCos to determine which young people are a priority for ELSA support. It is not recommended, nor is it common practise, that parent/carers make direct referrals for ELSA support. This is for a variety of reasons, but specifically they are not aware of the training and legitimate areas for ELSA intervention. For the same reason, school managers cannot be directed externally by any outside agency to agree ELSA work.
- Referrals should be discussed with the ELSA in terms of the appropriateness of the referral, the broad focus, main objectives and outline of activities for any referral agreed. Some schools will have an occasional, timetabled meeting (perhaps including e.g. a family support worker or other appropriate member of staff) where potential ELSA referrals may be discussed.
- The likely length of an ELSA involvement will also need discussion, with most lasting 6-12 weeks, dependent on contextual factors. Programmes longer than this may create over-dependency on the ELSA and may also indicate that clear programme aims have not been set. However, there will be circumstance where a longer involvement is required and this would typically be discussed with either the ELSA line manager or EP supervisor. It is good practice to separate blocks of ELSA involvement so that consolidation of skills can take place.
- Use of the already circulated referral, planning and evaluation forms is recommended although ELSAs and schools may wish to develop their own in time. ELSAs need to keep minimal summary records of their work with a child or young person. As these records may be legitimately requested by line managers and parent/carers they need to be written sensitively. If more extensive records of ELSA's involvement are requested by schools the ELSA will require additional time to complete this task away from face to face work.
- Good communication between the ELSA and other key staff is essential if new skills are to be generalised outside of the ELSA sessions. The child needs opportunities to practise the new skills being acquired in the face-to-face sessions; in their weekly sessions, a child can only begin to acquire new skills, but needs frequent opportunities to practise the skills in real life situations so they become fluent. This is exactly like learning to drive; a weekly driving lesson is not enough - practice is required in between. Additional time for staff liaison will need to be made away from the face-to-face work.
- Whilst some pupils referred for ELSA work will be considered to have special educational needs (usually under the SEMH category), ELSA work is not primarily intended as an SEN intervention. For example, children may have emotional needs such as bereavement or low self-esteem but with no special educational needs and these would constitute appropriate referrals.

- Most ELSAs are teaching assistants who wear a number of different ‘hats’ in school and they will need support at times to ensure that their ELSA work is kept as separate as reasonably possible from their other roles, to avoid confusion. For example, it may not be beneficial for an ELSA working with a particular child also to have to individually supervise their playground behaviour.
- In order for ELSAs to carry out their work, it will be necessary at times for them to be able to purchase resources from school funds. Some may be inexpensive (e.g. those available on the ELSA Support website), others (e.g. games, puppets) may be more so but should have a good ‘shelf life’. Some schools budget for a certain amount per year, depending on the existing levels of relevant resources.
- Signed parental consent for ELSA involvement can be obtained but is not necessary given that the ELSA is an employed member of the school staff. It is recommended, however, that the parent/carers are fully informed about the work the ELSA will do with good communication lines throughout the ELSA process.
- ELSAs must contact their line manager in school in the first instance with any concerns about their ELSA work. It is essential that line managers access the manager information offered at the start of the ELSA training course in order that they understand how their ELSA will work in the school. This may be through a face to face or virtual session with the trainers, or through a link to a video outlining the relevant information.
- There may be more than one ELSA in each school, in which case:
 - It is important that there is consideration of how the ELSA roles work together, including how the cases are split within the ELSA team (e.g. by Key Stage, area of need).
 - It is not recommended that one ELSA is line managed by the second ELSA, since this has the potential to limit the freedom of the ELSA to develop their own approach to practice. Rather, a collaborative, joint sharing approach is recommended.
 - If two ELSAs are trained *within the same cohort*, it is particularly important that the line manager is aware of the need to support how they work together to establish the ELSA role within the school.
 - Whether ELSAs from a single school attend the same or separate supervision groups should be based on the individual circumstances, in consultation with the individual ELSAs, their line managers and the course trainers/supervisors.

Further Information about On-Going ELSA Supervision

Supervision by an Educational Psychologist is considered an essential core element of ELSA. This is because ELSA has been designed as a psychological intervention for schools. Educational Psychologists are trained to provide a broader understanding in the area of children’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and seek to promote a greater understanding of the meaning behind behaviours. If we understand the purpose specific behaviours are serving for a child, we can look at the needs of the child differently and design bespoke support matched to those needs. EPs are uniquely placed in this role because of their extensive training in psychology and child development, and its application in the education system. By providing regular professional supervision to ELSAs in small groups we can support their continuing professional development, disseminate new research evidence, try to keep their working practices safe and help ensure safe intervention for vulnerable pupils.

ELSA supervision provides support to overcome frequently occurring challenges to the quality of their work. ELSAs work with some of the most vulnerable children in our schools, some of whom have very complex needs.

EP supervision for ELSAs is considered essential to the ELSA model of intervention, and this is why if it is removed those trained can no longer carry the role title of ELSA.