



Strode College, Offender Learning Services.

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### **Background to case study and reasons for choosing individual**

Strode College Offender Learning Services, has a contract with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide the education, including Skills for Life, within 13 prisons in the southwest of England. Approximately 350 teachers are employed by Strode College, Offender Learning Services for this purpose.

Teaching within a closed environment such as a 'prison' is very different from teaching in a normal college of FE, because of the many restrictions, rules and regulations placed both upon the teacher and the learner.

A prison's primary purpose is **security**, where education takes place, whereas a college of FE's purpose **is education**. A prison is also a multi discipline employer, with the Prison Service personnel taking the largest part of employment. Teachers within the organisation have to abide by rules and regulations that do not exist within colleges of FE.

### **Case Study**

Sally\* was employed as a part time teacher by Strode College to work in a new Information, Advice and Guidance Centre (IAG) set up within H.M.Prison A. Her previous qualifications were a Post Graduate Diploma in Guidance, a RSA in Counselling and a City and Guilds Teaching Literacy Certificate at Level 3.

Sally, as a well respected member of the Strode College 'teaching team', enrolled on a 2 year part-time Certificate in Education/PGCE course, taught within the prison. The course, delivered by the University of Plymouth, had a mixed cohort of Strode College teachers, prison inmates, prison officers and prison service civilian staff.

Strode College provided a Teacher Training Placement coordinator within the prison to 'look after' part time and full 'student teachers' within the prison.

## **Details of the trainee's ITT experience**

A pre Cert Ed course was started the term before the September cohort began. This was a very useful experience for Sally, as she was able to develop her study skills and she found it very helpful.

The Education Department had its own PCGE/Cert Ed library, supplied by the university, with a few of copies of each of the set books. This provided the students with a useful resource, which Sally, and the other students found very valuable.

### **Individual issues e.g. career aspirations, perception of support from your organisation, choice of ITT route, workload while going through ITT, relationship with mentor, need for other training etc.**

Sally had always had aspirations to teach, and thought it would sit alongside her existing qualifications and improve her career opportunities.

Sally experienced 'excellent' support, both from Strode College staff, the placement coordinator, education manager and teaching staff, and also from the University of Plymouth tutors who taught on the course.

Her choice of the part time ITT route was so that she could continue with her paid work, and practice whilst she was learning.

She did reduce her workload, so that she was able to cope well with the coursework and teaching practice whilst on the course.

Sally had chosen her own mentor which, in retrospect, was not a good choice. She had chosen Jill\*, a newly qualified PGCE teacher, who thought that Sally was 'better and more confident' than she was herself as a teacher. This left Sally with a slight problem, which she overcame by seeking extra support from the Education Manager, Placement Coordinator and other teachers in her department. She was happy that the support was there, even if it wasn't from her named mentor, and felt she had good support from the university tutors as well.

Her experience left her with doubts about the whole notion of 'mentoring'. She felt it should be more structured, she could have done with more 'talking through' her problems, more help with assignments and some re-assurance about her teaching. It was, as she described it, 'too loose'. There were no formal mentor/mentee meetings – just quick conversations over lunch breaks. Although Sally did feel she could have sought more help from Jill - and this she took on as her own responsibility – she felt she should have chosen a 'more experienced' mentor.

Sally thought that mentor training was important, as many staff, although helpful and very experienced in what they teach, needed some guidance on how to act as a 'mentor'. Jill was just lacking in confidence on how to offer that support.

**Organisational issues e.g. able to provide a mentor, time for mentoring, need for additional induction activities, cost of support, other qualifications required that had to be put off during period of ITT etc.**

The problems of providing mentors of 'quality' within the organisation (Strode College Offender Learning Services) are compounded by the situation within each prison establishment. Unless we can provide a mentor that is already working within that establishment, it requires extra security clearance – not an easy thing in itself – plus extra mentor and security/prison craft training.

Naturally, most mentoring takes time and commitment, and the perspective on whether we 'pay' or not, is up to the individual institution.

#### **Costs involved.**

- ❖ There would be costs involved to write and deliver a mentor training course, which would be difficult for both the organisation and each prison.
- ❖ There are also implications of 'mentor staff' wanting to be 'paid' to act as a mentor.
- ❖ We would have to provide extra staff to cover courses not run, by teachers undertaking the mentor training (backfilling), as we are contracted by the LSC to deliver a certain amount of 'teacher hours' in each establishment.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations about supporting trainee teachers from your organisation's perspective.**

Within Strode College Offender Learning Service, many well qualified teachers have a natural ability to be good mentors, whilst others would need to have additional training. Strode is committed to the development of ITT within the 13 prisons in the southwest.

A 'pre PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS course' which includes study skills, ICT skills and assignment writing, could be written to introduce trainee teachers/instructors to the type of work they will encounter in their new ITT courses.

We feel that Strode College should develop a 'Mentoring Course' which could be accredited (or not) so that the individual mentors can use it as part of their 30 hours of CPD.

We would expect all our teachers, as part of their own professionalism and their professional status, to be willing to help and be supportive towards new teachers training. This is what being a 'professional teacher' is all about.

\* Sally or \*Jill were not the real names of the teachers in this case study.

Note: The views in this case study are those of the author(s).