

Further Education Section

Guidelines for VECs and Youthreach and Community Training Centres on using the Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Services fund

January 2013

1. Introduction

These guidelines refer to the use in Youthreach centres managed by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and Community Training Centres (CTCs) managed by FÁS of a specific guidance, counselling and psychological services (referred to below as G,C&PS) budget which is allocated each year for the purposes of learner support.

Since the inception of the G,C&PS fund in 1998, a number of research studies, reviews and consultations have been conducted to identify best support practices in centres and these have informed policy to date. The decision to issue formal guidelines to VECs and centres has been taken following the survey of practice in 2009.

Support provision for learners through the G,C&PS fund sits within an educational framework that is, already learner-centred and concerned with the promotion of personal and social development. The key characteristics of the Youthreach programme are about the experiencing of respectful and supportive relationships, the learning of pro-social behaviours, the development of confidence, resilience and autonomy and the acquisition of a range of life skills and competencies in both group and one-to-one contexts and in ways that are pragmatic, learner-led, relevant, challenging and imaginative.

The G,C&PS provision contributes to the realisation of the programme goals by making it possible to bring into centres the additional expertise of professional practitioners and/or to dedicate time to specific support practices that are not otherwise provided for in the programme. This support represents an extension of the core work of the programme rather than an entirely separate provision and is neither an accessory to, nor a substitute for, that core work. The guiding principle behind good practice in centres generally is responsiveness to the needs of the learners. The purpose of the G,C&PS fund is to increase the capacity of centres to be creative and flexible in their responses.

2. Different kinds and levels of support provision

2.1 Tailoring provision to need

Surveys have consistently found that the most common use of the G,C&PS provision in Youthreach and Community Training Centres is for counselling. Many centres report that they contract a counsellor, psychotherapist or counselling psychologist for a number of hours each week to provide one-to-one services to their learners. While this may be an appropriate use of the G,C&PS provision in some cases it is not the only way to provide services under this budget. There are a number of means by which practical and emotional support can be provided to learners. The decision on which ones to offer requires the careful identification of learner needs and difficulties and an understanding of the learners' developmental levels. Tailoring support in an effective way requires flexibility, creativity and responsiveness on the part of the centre.

2.2 Support provision as a continuum of measures

As part of their general programme, centres provide a broad spectrum of support measures to their learners. Some of these are provided by the ordinary staff as part of the normal culture of support in a centre, including:

- Information, advice or practical help, which can be requested from a member of staff in relation to any aspect of the programme
- Key working, where time is allocated for the learner to review their progress in the centre and to discuss any difficulties they might be having with attendance, participation, learning or social interaction.

Staff may also be in a position to offer additional means of learner support, such as:

- Mentoring, where the learner is given space to talk about their problems and to express their feelings to a sympathetic and non-judgemental listener, with the emphasis on increasing self-awareness and the exploration of practical solutions to current difficulties.
- Frontline guidance, where the focus is on managing career options and choices through the organisation of work experience, information-gathering on jobs and training courses, CV preparation and practice for job interviews.

The G,C&PS budget is generally used by centres to buy in additional support on a sessional basis in order to deliver more formal and expert forms of support provision, such as:

- Counselling, where the learner is given the chance to clarify their problems in greater depth, exploring their nature and origin, and to look at the defences they are using in their life. (Psychotherapy involving the exploration of subconscious processes and the resolution of deep-seated conflicts is not generally appropriate for this age group or context. However, if a learner is engaging in activities that put their health or life in significant danger – as in serious substance misuse, eating disorders, risk-taking behaviours – the support of a fully qualified psychotherapist may be warranted.)
- Psychological assessment, where learning or other difficulties are investigated.

In addition it should be remembered that there are many forms of support provision available *outside* the centre from statutory bodies such as the HSE, Probation Services and Social

Welfare, and from a wide range of local non-statutory and voluntary organisations. These include community clinical psychology services, psychiatric care, family support and addiction services. The centre's role in relation to these external supports is to help learners to identify and access them and to engage in inter-agency work with them when appropriate.

2.3 Levels of support provision

The different kinds of support provision described above can be considered in terms of the *level* of formal expertise involved. All require some observation, empathy and listening and are based on the establishment of a relationship that provides the learner with a supportive ally. In the more informal kinds of support the focus is on providing practical help, minimising anxiety and reinforcing the learner's defences. With clinical forms of support such as counselling and psychotherapy, the work goes more deeply into sense of self and may entail the addressing of conflict and the re-experiencing of trauma. A considerably more profound level of expertise is clearly required of the practitioner for this latter kind of work.

It is necessary that practitioners providing *any* form of professional support to learners – whether frontline guidance, mentoring, counselling, psychotherapy or a psychological service – have adequate and suitable training for the work that they do.

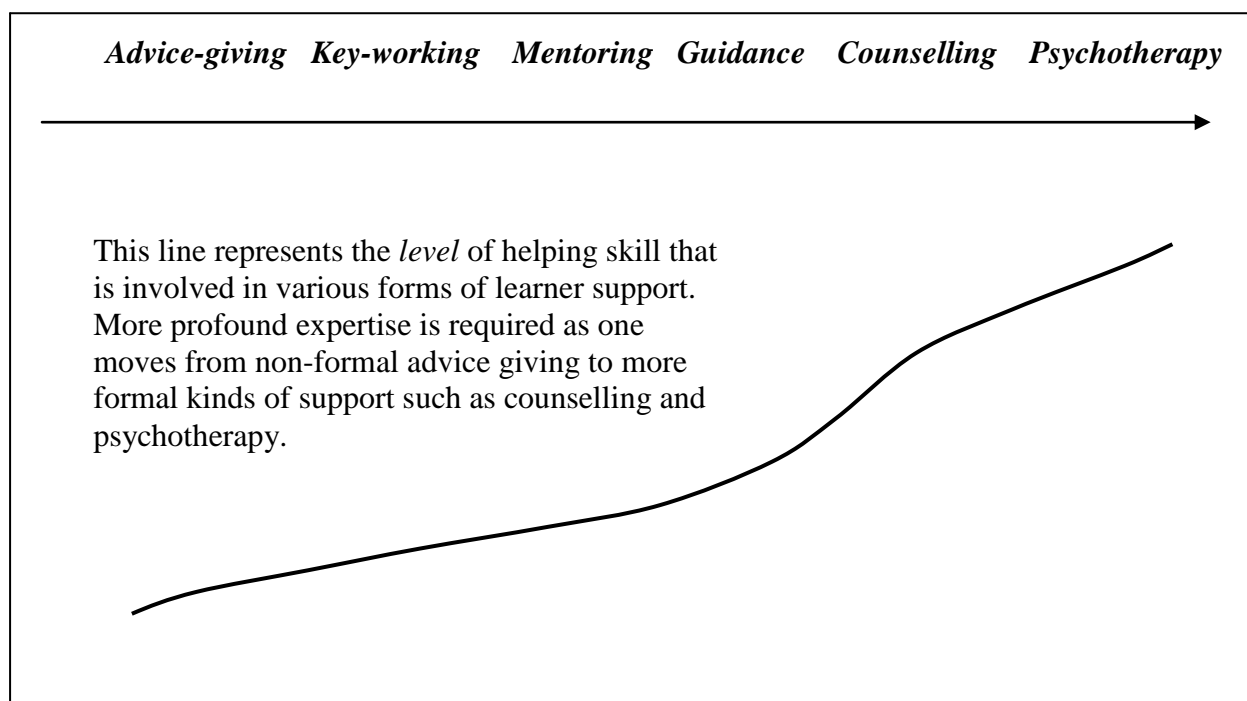


Figure 1: *Level of expertise involved in the delivery of forms of learner support*

2.4 Non-verbal therapies

Not all support services are based on talk. Some therapeutic approaches use modalities other than conversation, such as music, dance, play, art, drama, movement and touch. These approaches can also operate on a range of levels and require different types of formal

qualification and expertise. For some learners a non-verbal form of therapeutic support will be more effective than a verbal one. For example, a participant who is lacking in social confidence may gain from an approach that primarily uses performance while one with an addiction issue may benefit from a physical therapy. Practitioners of these kinds of therapies must also be adequately trained in their field.

2.5 Psychological and psychiatric services

Psychological services come in many different forms and may overlap with other types of support service. For example, counselling psychologists use psychotherapy approaches with individuals and groups and may also provide training and supervision to staff. Educational psychologists engage in individual casework, including assessment, and may also support systemic change at a whole centre level. Clinical psychologists are frequently attached to HSE community-based services, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and may work as part of an inter-disciplinary team. Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists are the professionals most likely to be involved in the diagnosis and treatment of medically-based psychiatric conditions, as well as in supporting young people with more severe kinds of mental health difficulty. To access these services the learner is generally referred by their GP or, in an emergency situation, goes through a hospital A&E department.

2.6. Non-formal services

The availability of support services in the community does not mean that they will be used. There is considerable evidence that young people frequently ignore the professional services that are available to them, with those who are most troubled and at risk appearing to be the least inclined to attend formal professional services. Research (e.g. Friel and Coulter, 2004) has also indicated that young people are more likely to turn to their friends for advice and help than to professionals, or they will approach sympathetic adults that they know and trust. For these reasons, the most appropriate and effective forms of support will frequently be those provided by peers and by teaching staff. A warm social ethos in the centre, group sessions using Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programmes, social and sporting activities, peer support and key working by staff are all important forms of support and, for many, represent the only ones that they will be willing to use or, indeed, all that they need.

2.7 Mentoring

Key-working provides an opportunity for a learner to meet regularly with a member of staff to review their progress in the centre, with the main focus on vocational and educational issues. Mentoring involves a more skilled form of support by staff because it addresses social and personal difficulties and the barriers in a young person's life that may be interfering with their attendance, engagement and participation in the centre. The advantage of mentoring is that it is provided in a natural setting by a familiar adult who already has an established working relationship with the learner. This increases the likelihood of the learner making use of the service and benefiting from it.

2.8 Increasing centre capacity to meet learner needs

Flexibility is necessary if the needs of learners at different stages of their progress through the centre are to be addressed. The guidance, counselling and psychological services fund should be seen as a means to increase the capacity of the centre to provide generally for its learners' needs and not simply as a way of obtaining a number of counselling hours per week. Thought should therefore go into how the G,C&PS resource can best be utilised. For example, instead of employing a counsellor or psychotherapist to engage only in one-to-one sessions with learners, they could work with groups of learners (for example, in group counselling or process work involving some aspect of SPHE) or they could work with staff to analyse the social dynamics in the centre or to increase their listening skills and their ability to respond in sympathetic and non-judgemental (but systematic and controlled) ways to the more challenging learners. A particularly effective use of a G,C&PS practitioner is through their involvement in a care team. Here the staff get a chance to discuss their concerns about particular learners with the benefit of the insight, advice, guidance and supervision that can be provided by a support professional.

3. A developmental model of progress

3.1 Developmental steps

Progress for a learner occurs over a series of developmental steps which can be seen as comprising a continuum. Each phase involves different tasks for the learner and each builds on the success of previous ones. While individual learners may move at different rates through the continuum, or even circle back again over ground previously covered, none can skip a phase entirely and make a good transition through the programme. The key features of each phase in this developmental continuum are indicated below.

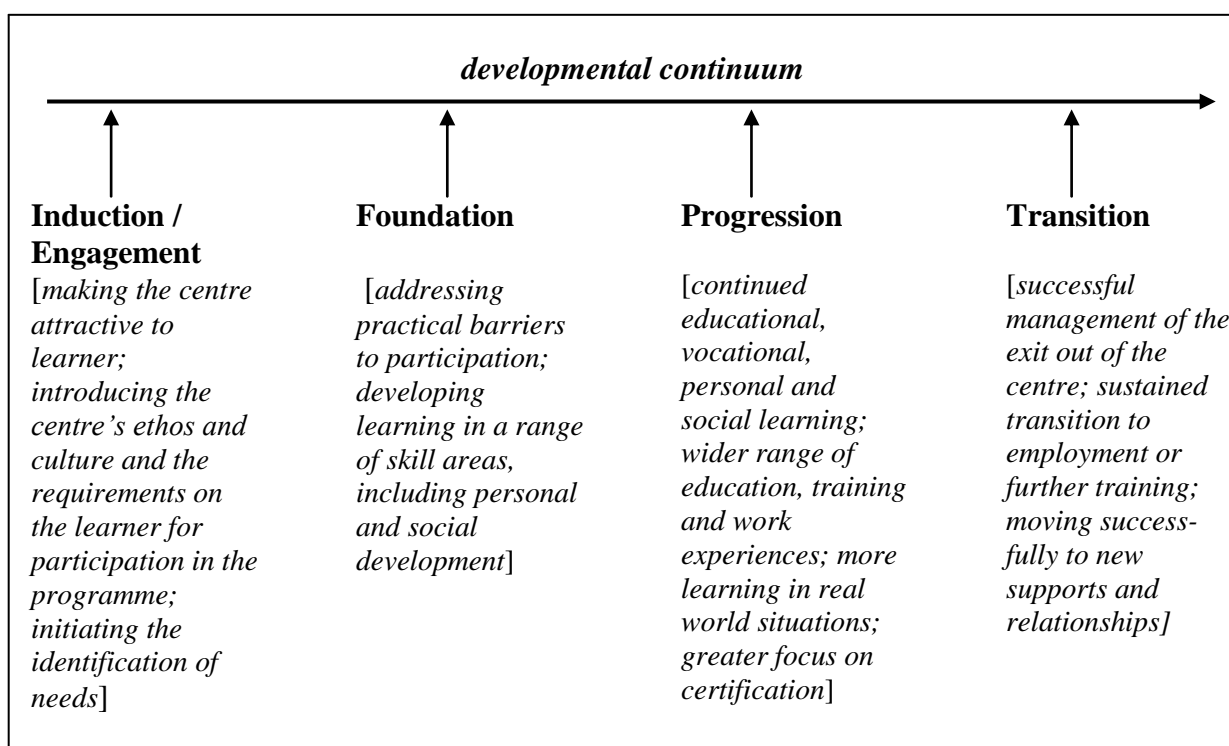


Figure 2: Phases along the developmental continuum

3.2 Supporting the developmental process

Transition through each stage is facilitated by a range of actions and interventions, many of which can be carried out by staff employed in the centres. For example, pastoral support, soft skills development and SPHE, and key working are a normal part of the general duties of staff in centres. With specific inservice training backed up by regular professional support, staff members can also provide mentoring to learners. If it happens that a member of staff is formally qualified in some form of health promotion, counselling, guidance or therapy, their skills may be used for these activities. In addition, formally qualified support practitioners can be contracted to provide expert services, including formal guidance, counselling, psychotherapy, non-verbal therapies and psychological services.

3.3 Supports related to developmental phases

Different kinds of support intervention will be appropriate for different phases along the developmental continuum.

3.3.1 Induction / engagement

The main focus is on relationship-building so that the learner feels welcome and comfortable in the centre, becomes willing to accept the centre's rules and ways of doing things and gets interested in participating socially and academically. Key working and engagement in social, sporting and physical activities are particularly appropriate for this stage. Non-formal activities that help to develop self-awareness and self-acceptance are also useful. The identification of particular needs and difficulties and also of strengths and interests will begin.

3.3.2 Foundation

The learner's progress begins to be tied to more formal kinds of learning. Support with the development of basic skills (e.g. reading, numeracy, IT) may now be accepted, including literacy and psychological assessment if appropriate. Personal and social development – taught both formally through programmes or informally through the way staff engage with learners – is central. Behaviours and practical barriers that interfere with attendance and participation can now be addressed or challenged and individual plans to deal with difficulties developed. Key working provides support for academic and vocational development, while mentoring also enhances responsibility, maturation and the addressing of personal difficulties.

3.3.3 Progression

Confidence based on improved competence and achievement increases. Key working and/or mentoring lead to more focused plans. More specific educational and training opportunities, work experience and non-formal guidance encourage vocational progression. Counselling or psychotherapy may be helpful for addressing significant personal difficulties if the learner feels ready to do some work on these or if the severity of the difficulties makes addressing them a matter of urgency. Preparation for certification becomes increasingly important.

3.3.4 Transition

The learner now has the beginnings of a sense of who they are and what they want, and of their strengths and what they can do. They are drafting a plan for the next stage of their life. Formal career guidance and advice on how to access information on jobs, training and educational options helps them move on out of the centre. For a period, continuing practical and emotional support from their key worker or mentor who knows them well can help them to manage the emotional transition and to have the confidence to negotiate their way in new surroundings. Engagement in interagency work ensures that the learner is aware of and/or linked in to services and supports in the community and elsewhere.

4. Direction on the use of the G,C&PS fund

4.1 All centres must receive support services

All Youthreach centres and CTCs are entitled to G,C&PS support from the dedicated budget paid by the Department to VECs for this purpose. The budget may not be used for any other function and VECs must ensure that all the centres in their area have access to some form/s of service on a reliable and regular basis. The organisation of the services is a matter for each VEC. VECs may themselves organise the provision of a service to centres or they may allocate a portion of the budget to each centre for the centre to use as it sees fit, subject to these guidelines and the supervision of the CEO. VECs will monitor support practices across all centres and will provide the Department with a report on the use of the fund when requested each year.

4.2 Review of support services

It is important that centres carry out an annual review of their G,C&PS. In the VEC Youthreach centres this can be done as part of the Quality Framework internal centre evaluation process. Such a review will involve the conducting of a needs analysis of their learners – better still, a needs analysis *with* their learners – and an evaluation of the effectiveness of their current support provision. Following this review the centre coordinator / manager will discuss with the VEC and the support practitioners the nature of the services being provided and introduce new practices if the review indicates that there are more effective ways to respond to learner needs.

4.3 Minimum supports for all learners

All learners should have access to a minimum level of support and to a range of interventions which increase their engagement with the programmes and their capacity to benefit from their time in a centre. These interventions, which are a core part of the Youthreach programme, should include a managed induction process, activities to promote personal and social development¹, regular key working sessions, provision of non-formal guidance and support for transition. These forms of support are most appropriately provided by the staff in the centre. A portion of the G,C&PS budget, however, may be used to pay for some additional support-related work. These are listed below in Section 5.1.

¹ Examples of activities promoting personal and social development are formally timetabled curricular sessions in SPHE, including self-awareness and mental health; the modelling by staff of and direct teaching about social and self-regulation skills; actions to encourage fitness and physical health, such as sports and outdoor pursuits, and registration with a local GP and dentist; lessons in aspects of physical and sexual health and drugs awareness education; activities that promote self expression and creativity, for example involving performance or the production of artefacts; activities that promote enterprise, social action or citizenship and which engage the learners in their local communities; activities that increase life experiences and create opportunities for practising life skills, such as travelling within Ireland or abroad; opportunities for helping others and engaging in acts of care and generosity.

Any kind of frontline support provided by staff to learners (e.g. mentoring, non-formal guidance) must be based on solid training and underpinned by the more formal expertise of professionally qualified practitioners. A good use of the G,C&PS fund, then, is to pay formally qualified practitioners to supervise and support staff in the delivery of frontline services to learners.

4.4 G,C&PS funded provision of supports for learners by professionally qualified support practitioners

Many learners have no special needs or personal difficulties that require any additional support or intervention above that provided by the normal programme in the centre. However, a significant number of learners would benefit from formal support and the main role of the G,C&P fund is to take account of the nature of their difficulties and to make formal support services available to them. In these cases the provision of services is by professional support practitioners (e.g. a guidance counsellor, psychologist, psychotherapist or other type of therapist).

A formally qualified support practitioner providing a service in a centre must have a recognised qualification in their branch of professional practice and be a member of their appropriate professional body, e.g. the Psychological Society of Ireland, the British Psychological Society, the Irish Council for Psychotherapy, the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy. The reason for requiring them to be a member of a professional body is two-fold: it ensures that they have the requisite qualification; and it commits them to practise within a set of ethical standards. Practitioners should also be in receipt of regular supervision themselves.

4.5 A flexible approach to support provision

Given the importance of flexibility and responsiveness, the ideal situation for any centre is to have a range of options available to it. A particularly valuable resource is a psychotherapist or psychologist who has a good relationship with the staff in a centre and can advise and support them in analysing difficult situations, in identifying possible interventions (including those the staff can deliver directly themselves, those that require the skills of a formally-qualified practitioner and those that are available outside the centre in the community), and who can provide staff support and supervision to those doing key-working or mentoring. Acting as a backup to staff rather than always being the first port of call can be a much more effective use of a psychotherapist or psychologist's expertise and time.

5. Appropriate interventions and supports

5.1 Interventions and actions carried out by centre staff members:

5.1.1 *Assessment at induction*

The purpose of the induction process is to welcome the new learners, to give them the opportunity to introduce themselves and to engage with the staff and the other learners, to present the ethos and culture of the centre and to explain about the rules and policies. As part of induction it is useful to carry out an assessment, in partnership with them, of their learning to date, of what they see as their strengths and weaknesses, and of their interests and goals.

5.1.2 *Implementation of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)*

SPHE is a core part of the Youthreach curriculum and should be featured clearly in the timetable. It is recommended that staff do the training in SPHE methodologies that is provided by the Department of Education SPHE Support Service. Centres should continually update their practice in this area and become familiar with the topics, materials, approaches and programmes that are available (e.g. Soft Skills Framework, Mental Health).

5.1.3 *Critical incident planning*

Most centres will experience a serious critical incident at some point (perhaps involving the deaths by suicide, accident or crime of learners or of others close to them in their families or community). In these cases the first task is to put protective measures in place to support vulnerable learners and to manage the effects of the incident. All centres should have a plan in place to guide their response when such a situation arises.

5.1.4 *Interagency liaison and working*

Centres will never be able to meet all the needs of their learners and it is not appropriate that they should try. However, they have an important role in putting learners in touch with the health, welfare and therapeutic services outside of the centre that may be able to help them. Centre staff should be able to identify the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary agencies in the community and know how to make contact with them and how to use the referral routes to them.

5.1.5 *Mentoring*

The focus in mentoring is on the identification and addressing in a non-formal manner of personal difficulties which may interfere with the learner's capacity to benefit from their time in the centre. The learner is given the chance to think about and to evaluate their current situation, to identify what is motivating and important for them and to develop an individual action plan that they can commit to. The G,C&PS budget may be utilised to provide staff support and case supervision to members of staff engaging in mentoring.

5.1.6 *Frontline guidance*

Vocational guidance is central to the organisation of and preparation for work experience, for general progression within the centre and eventually for transition out of the centre. Some frontline guidance can be provided by members of staff with no

specific guidance qualification. There are guidelines on this on the WebWheel site (<http://www.youthreach.ie/webwheel/reports/Reports.htm#Guidance%20on%20work%20experience%20and%20transition>). However, a qualified guidance practitioner should be consulted to advise on the content of this provision and the most appropriate methodologies to use.

5.1.7 Support after transition

Some learners find it difficult to make the transition from the centre to further training or employment. In these cases the staff may provide some ongoing practical or emotional support to the learners for a while until they have settled in. In addition, it is important to link vulnerable learners who are lacking sources of personal support with appropriate health and other services when they are leaving.

5.1.8 Funding for support provision by staff

In general, the forms of support described above are part of the core work of every centre and are therefore funded under the main programme.

5.2 Interventions and services provided by formally qualified support practitioners:

5.2.1 Personal and social development programmes

Some professional training or therapeutic services specialise in working with young people through programmes designed to enhance a specific aspect of personal and social development. They work directly with the young people either on site or out of the centre. Examples of suitable personal and social programmes of this kind would be *mental health and suicide prevention, anti-bullying, mindfulness, assertiveness, restorative practice, equine assisted learning, anger management, team building, process work, drumming workshops and sexual health*. The contracting of these kinds of programmes is an appropriate use of the G,C&PS budget.

5.2.2 Formal vocational guidance

All learners should have the opportunity to experience the services of a fully qualified guidance practitioner at some point before they leave the centre. This would normally be towards the end of a learner's time in the programme with a view to preparing them for transition to further training or employment. Formal guidance can also be useful at earlier stages to help guide subject choice, to identify learner strengths and interests and to prepare for work experience.

5.2.3 Counselling, psychotherapy or other kinds of individual therapy

For some learners formal counselling, psychotherapeutic or counselling psychological interventions are necessary because of the severity of the risk factors involved and/or the fragility of their identity. It is the seriousness of the learner's difficulties that makes a high level of expertise in the practitioner necessary. Others will benefit from therapeutic approaches using non-verbal modalities (e.g. music, dance, play, art, process or experiential, drama, movement, touch).

5.2.4 Group therapy

Many therapies can be delivered in groups and gain from the opportunity for social learning that is possible in the social interaction of the group as well as from the increase in the number of learners who can benefit.

5.2.5 Psychological interventions

Occasionally it may be helpful to arrange a psychological assessment for a learner who appears to have some kind of learning problem or other area of disability. A psychologist might be asked to advise on whole centre approaches to learning or other issues or to provide staff training. In the case of a critical incident the support of a psychologist is advisable. If this is not available from the HSE or NEPS it should be bought in privately.

5.2.6 Staff support and case supervision

It is highly desirable that all staff have access to some professional support and supervision. For staff providing frontline guidance or mentoring to learners regular professional support and case supervision by a fully qualified psychotherapist or psychologist is mandatory. In staff support the objective is to help the staff member manage their role with a focus on building their self-awareness and understanding of their own needs. In case supervision the practitioner is consulted about a learner and contributes to the analysis of that learner's needs and to the planning of appropriate actions or interventions by staff in the centre. They may also recommend referral to a service outside the centre if they consider this to be required. A care team is a useful mechanism for case supervision in relation to a group of learners. Provision of both staff support and supervision is an appropriate use of the G,C&PS fund.

5.2.7 Funding of support by professional support practitioners

The above section describes services provided by support practitioners who are not generally members of staff. These services are paid for from the G,C&PS fund.