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At Lincoln, the Learning Support department was restructured in 1997 to enable it to fulfil a strategically critical role within the University - the establishment of what was then called an Intensely Supported Learning Environment. Learning Support required a staffing structure that was flexible and responsive enough to deal with the cultures and orientation of individual campuses, schools and subjects, as well as future change as a consequence of the movement towards a 'New Learning Environment'. The strategic imperatives strongly influenced the development of the new Departmental structure.

The restructuring in 1997 involved the establishment of new staff roles based on a set of 'job families', as job groupings were called, each with a specific functional focus, such as service, learning or technical. These were underpinned by the concept of multi-skilling and the establishment of a competency framework, with requirements for each job family and level. Helpdesks were staffed by multi-skilled staff with the aim of achieving a one-stop-shop approach to learner support, whereby 80 per cent of all frontline enquiries, library and information, IT and media support, could be answered at the point of contact. The competency framework is explained more fully in Allan (1998). (See Appendices E and F for samples of job descriptions.)

One of the key features and major successes of the review was the establishment of the Learning Adviser job family, the chief objective of which was to work more closely with academic staff in subject teams to support the University's teaching and learning activity. The development of this role implemented the requirement for closer partnership and integration between Learning Support and the academic community, with active support for the curriculum through course development and delivery, and provision of workshops to support generic learner-support skills in the areas of information retrieval and the effective use of communications and information technology, and media technology. Learning Advisers were required to develop skills in facilitating learning, curriculum development, and product development; further, in addition to a subject specialism, each had a Learning Support specialism, commonly information handling, information technology or media. Some who were appointed initially to Learning Adviser posts had no specific subject background, though they have since demonstrated their adaptability and made a success of this role.

With the exception of shelvers, all other Support Department staff acquired new job roles and titles in the restructuring. The two largest groupings were Learning Advisers and Service Advisers. The former job title resonated within the University environment, while the latter was a generic title that could also be found in any service-oriented sector such as retailing. However, on a pragmatic note, although there were no other Service Advisers elsewhere in the University, there were some staff in faculties who were also called Learning Advisers, so some confusion has arisen.

The review also redefined the roles of managers, creating departmental manager posts which

combined managing staff with a functional cross-departmental role. The original intention was to have four managers with responsibility for academic services (including Learning Advisers and Technical Advisers), customer services (including Service Advisers and Shelves), resources (with no line management responsibility) and IT. However, this last post was deleted.