The characteristics of support staff and preparedness

DISS project briefing note 2

Peter Blatchford, Paul Bassett, Penelope Brown, Clare Martin, Anthony Russell & Rob Webster

This briefing note summarises findings from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** on support staff characteristics and the preparedness of teachers and the category of support staff that forms nearly a quarter of the school workforce – teaching assistants (TAs). We present a new typology of support staff and some broad descriptors detailing who they are. We introduce the component of preparedness and show that much work is needed in terms of improving training, communication and role preparation for teachers and TAs in order to maximise the effectiveness of TAs.

Aim of the DISS project

To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of TAs and other support staff and their characteristics, and how these changed over time

Characteristics of support staff and preparedness of TAs: data collection methods and responses

Surveys	Responses from 6,079 schools, 4,091 teachers and 7,667 support staff
Case studies	65 schools; 591 interviews with school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils

Who are the support staff?

Classification of support staff

• Wide variety of support staff roles, responsibilities and job titles
• New classification of support staff developed to reflect role expansion following the remodelling of the school workforce
• New typology developed through systematic grouping of post titles based on similarities in activities, using cluster analysis

TA equivalent	Pupil welfare	Technicians	Other pupil support
Teaching assistant	Learning mentor	ICT manager	Bilingual support
Higher level teaching assistant	Education welfare officer	ICT technician	Cover supervisor
Classroom asst	Welfare assistant	Librarian	Escort
Learning support assistant (LSA)	Connexions advisor	Technology technician	Midday supervisor
LSA (for SEN)	Nurse	Science technician	Midday assistant
Nursery nurse	Home-liaison		Language asst
Therapist			Exam invigilator

Administration staff		Facilities staff	Site staff
Administrator	Secretary	Cleaner	Caretaker
Office manager	PA to Head	Cook	Premises manager
Finance officer	Data manager	Other catering	
Bursar	Exam officer		
Attendance officer			

Characteristics of support staff

• Support staff make up nearly half of school workforce (DfE, 2010)
• Almost one in four people in school workforce is a TA (DfE, 2010)
• Majority of support staff are female, white ethnic origin, aged 36+
• Men are under-represented in classroom roles (e.g. TA), but make up around 75% of site staff and around 41% of technicians
• 35% of all support staff had qualifications above GCSE-level. This proportion is higher for TA equivalent category (41%)
• 65% of all support staff had qualifications at or below GCSE-level. This proportion is lower for TA equivalent category (59%)
• Schools reported the main reasons for increasing the number of support staff between 2003-08 were: i) the rise in pupils with SEN included in mainstream settings; ii) more money to spend; and iii) the introduction of guaranteed non-contact time for teachers

Support staff's conditions of employment

Job satisfaction

• 89% of support staff were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their job
• Support staff reported high levels of satisfaction with their contracts and working arrangements (around 77%)
• Support staff were more satisfied with training they received (76%), than with training opportunities available to them (62%)
• Over time, support staff's level of satisfaction with how much they felt appreciated by the school declined (69% at Wave 3)
• 44% of support staff reported dissatisfaction with their pay

Goodwill of support staff

• **At Wave 3, 71% of support staff reported working extra hours**
• Support staff were three times more likely to work extra hours **voluntarily**, than because they were **required** to by a member of staff (e.g. TAs meet with teachers in their own time after school)
• Half of support staff (largely TAs and pupil welfare staff) were not paid for the extra hours they worked

Preparedness

Preparedness 1: training for TAs and teachers

• Most support staff (84% at Wave 3) had attended Inset or some other training event within the past two years
• Some TAs criticised the higher level TA accreditation process, citing poor administration and that it did not lead to promotion
• **At each wave, 75% of teachers reported never having had any training to help them work with TAs or other support staff**
• Yet teachers' involvement in directly training or developing support staff increased at each wave, to 55% at Wave 3
• Two-thirds of teachers who line managed support staff had not received any training or development to help them in this role
• Majority of teachers who had had training for either working with or line managing support staff said it had lasted only one day or less. Only half of teachers rated these types of training as useful

Preparedness 2: Teacher-TA planning and feedback

Main findings from the surveys

• **75% of teachers had no allocated planning or feedback time with TAs.** This figure was 95% for secondary school teachers
• Teacher-TA communication was ad hoc, occurring at lesson change-over, before/after school, and/or at break/lunch times
• Communication relied on the goodwill of TAs (e.g. unpaid hours)

Main findings from the case studies

• Many TAs were not involved with lesson planning and felt under-prepared for tasks they supported pupils with
• TAs picked up subject and pedagogical knowledge by 'tuning in' to teachers' delivery to the whole class
• TAs 'frustrated' that information fed back to teachers was not used (e.g. integrated into future lesson planning)

Recommendations

• Schools must ensure the goodwill of TAs is not abused, and that they are appropriately rewarded for the work they do
• More needed to prepare teachers to work with and manage TAs
• More time is needed for teachers and TAs to have joint planning and feedback time, particularly in secondary schools

Reference: DfE (2010) *School workforce in England [SFR 11/2010]*