



## The positive impact of maths and science HLTAs

Matthew Walker

*The real advantage of the HLTA role is intervention and the ability to work with small groups with the full confidence of their departments. (Headteacher)*

In 2004, the Government committed to recruiting, training and supporting two cadres of Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), specialising in secondary maths or science. The HLTA status recognises the higher-level skills and knowledge that support staff require to lead a range of learning-related activities under the direction and supervision of a teacher.

NFER was commissioned by The Training and Development Agency for Schools to investigate the deployment and impact of maths and science HLTAs. Researchers conducted surveys with a range of school staff and made case-study visits to nine schools in 2008 and 2009.

### Deployment and line management arrangements

Almost half of the HLTAs surveyed reported that they were line managed by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, while approximately four out of ten said they were line managed by their subject leader. HLTAs with a special educational needs line manager were more likely to report that their roles and responsibilities were not defined and that their skills and interests were not always matched to the school. Schools may find it helpful to ensure their HLTAs have regular contact with and receive support from a subject specialist. Overall, HLTA line management arrangements appeared to

be fluid and in the process of evolving, as schools and departments work out what is the most effective arrangement for their particular circumstances.

Many HLTAs reported that they most frequently worked with pupils who found mathematics or science challenging and supported pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Observations and interviews in the case-study schools showed a wide range of teaching tasks, including:

- working with small groups of pupils independently outside the classroom
- co-teaching in the same classroom environment with the subject teacher
- supporting individual pupils in the classroom.

Covering lessons and producing resources were also seen as HLTA roles, as well as being a form tutor, cover organiser, managing other support staff and running additional extra-curricular activities. Put together, these suggest not only innovative approaches to subject delivery but also a wider contribution to the department and school.

### Impact of the HLTA role

There was broad consensus that HLTAs had a significant impact on pupils. Improvements in learning attainment, (including 'faster progression') were described, but school staff also highlighted pupils' greater enjoyment of and engagement with maths and science, their increase in confidence and improved behaviour. Pupils interviewed as part of the case studies noted that small group work with an HLTA:

- made it easier to concentrate and stay on task
- made them feel comfortable, confident and able to ask questions
- made learning fun and helped them recognise the importance of the subject.

Departmental benefits associated with the role included HLTAs helping to plan lessons and develop support materials, better teaching, and the positive impact on pupil achievement.

The majority of teachers reported that HLTAs made a positive contribution to improving the quality of their teaching, while many agreed that having an HLTA to support them had helped to reduce their stress levels and workload.

HLTAs themselves reported that achieving the status had led to improved job satisfaction and had increased their science or maths subject knowledge. Many also reported that achieving the status had helped with their career development and increased their recognition within the school.

Overall, the study has found that schools valued the contribution that mathematics and science HLTAs were making to school life. Schools that had embraced the role had found their maths and science HLTAs were helping to support pupils with specific and varied needs, contributing to pupils' understanding of maths and science topics, and helping to improve pupil achievement and opportunities for personalised learning.

### Further information

[www.nfer.ac.uk/hlta](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/hlta)



## The effects of being 'summer born' on attainment and development

Allie Chownsmith

New research into the relative age of learners – the youngest compared to the oldest in a year group – investigates the problems this can cause in the international context. *The Influence of Relative Age on Learner Attainment and Development* was based on evidence from 13 countries, key findings include the following.

- Pupils who are younger in the year group do less well in attainment tests, are more frequently identified as having special educational needs and are more frequently referred to psychiatric services.
- Effects on attainment are quite large

when children start school, but get progressively smaller as they get older.

- The strategies identified as most likely to help reduce relative age effects are to use age-standardised tests, ensure that relatively younger pupils have an appropriate curriculum, and improve teachers' awareness of the issue.
- The review does not recommend deferring entry to school for a year for the youngest children or requiring them to repeat a year, as happens in other countries.

### Further information

[www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/QSB01/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/QSB01/)