the employment and deployment of teaching assistants

by Paula Smith, Karen Whitby and Caroline Sharp
National Foundation for Educational Research

LGA educational research programme

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Introduction

The role of teaching assistants in schools has been developing over a number of years. In recent decades there has been a move towards the increasing inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. This has led to a greater need for additional support in classrooms, a role often provided by teaching assistants. More recently, a drive by the Government to raise standards in schools and tackle teacher workloads has also changed the way teaching assistants are being used in schools and has increased the diversity and range of tasks that they carry out. A National Agreement 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workloads' between the Government, local authority employers and school workforce unions was signed on 15 January 2003. The Agreement has a number of key features, which include contractual changes for teachers and a progressive reduction in teachers' overall hours which will inevitably lead to further changes in support staff roles.

Key findings

The findings acknowledged similarities and differences in the views and experiences between the groups of respondents (headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants), and between respondents in the different phases (primary and secondary). Findings are presented on the characteristics of teaching assistants, the employment of teaching assistants, the ways in which they are deployed in schools, their professional and career development opportunities and the impact of teaching assistants in schools.

Characteristics of teaching assistants

Based on the most frequent responses to a number of questions, which asked teaching assistants to provide background details, the following picture emerged. Teaching assistants were most commonly known as 'teaching assistants', they tended to be in the age range of 41 to 50 years, they were usually female, tended not to speak an additional language other than English and had caring responsibilities e.g. a child or elderly relative. These findings reflected responses from teaching assistants in both the primary and secondary phases.

Employment of teaching assistants

- As may be expected, primary schools tended to employ fewer teaching assistants than secondary schools. The average number of teaching assistants in primary schools was six and in secondary schools ten.

- On average, teaching assistants in secondary schools received slightly higher annual pay than teaching assistants in primary schools, which may have been due to the fact that teaching assistants in the secondary phase were generally employed for more hours than those in the primary phase. Teaching assistants in both phases were most frequently employed on permanent contracts. Permanent all-year contracts were more common in primary schools and permanent term-time contracts were more common in secondary schools.

Deployment of teaching assistants

- Most teachers responding to the survey reported that they worked with at least one teaching assistant. This reflected the fact that schools were advised to distribute questionnaires to those teachers who worked most frequently with teaching assistants. However, some teachers reported that they worked with more than one teaching assistant.

- The support which teachers received from teaching assistants tended to be on a daily basis in primary schools and

slightly less often in secondary schools. Teachers were mixed in their responses about whether they were satisfied with this level of support. Primary teachers were slightly more satisfied with their allocation of teaching assistant support than secondary teachers.

- Teaching assistants worked with a range of year groups. In primary schools, teaching assistants were more likely to divide their time between year groups. Teaching assistants in secondary schools most frequently reported that they worked with five year groups. Slightly more secondary than primary teaching assistants worked with pupils with special needs.

- Generally, teaching assistants were not required to cover whole lessons in the absence of a qualified teacher. It appeared that they were more likely to provide short periods of whole-class supervision whilst the teacher dealt with an incident elsewhere.

Professional and career development
- Schools were more likely to have in place policies for the professional development of teaching assistants and less likely to have a career structure for teaching assistants which outlined criteria for promotion and/or increases in their salary.

- The majority of teaching assistants reported that they were invited to participate in various professional development activities, such as whole-school INSET and courses specifically tailored for teaching assistants.

- Barriers which prevented teaching assistants accessing CPD activities varied between respondents. Teaching assistants were more likely to highlight school-based issues, such as not being invited to attend CPD activities or that the school could not afford to fund their attendance. Headteachers more often mentioned practical barriers such as teaching assistants having family

commitments which prevented their participation or that teaching assistants found the times at which courses were organised made them inaccessible.

- The majority of teaching assistants seemed happy to remain in their current post, in the short-term at least, but were less sure about their long-term career development. Very few reported that they could see themselves as qualified teachers in either one year or five years' time.

Impact of teaching assistants
- The area in which teaching assistants were felt to have the most impact was the additional support they provided for pupil learning. This was identified across both phases and by all three respondent groups. The support they provided for the teacher was also acknowledged. Impacts on the reduction of teacher workloads were not as commonly reported. In secondary schools, few teachers felt that teaching assistants had helped reduce their workload.

- Teaching assistants were identified as having many positive effects on pupil performance. In particular, the fact that they were able to deliver concentrated levels of support to specific individuals or small groups of pupils was highlighted.

- The main difficulty associated with working with teaching assistants was the lack of time teachers and teaching assistants had to prepare together. This was identified by teaching assistants, headteachers and teachers.

- Respondents suggested a number of measures which could be introduced in order to make the work of teaching assistants more effective. Teaching assistants agreed that clarification of their roles in schools and the introduction of a career structure through which they could gain promotion and/or an increase in their salary, would encourage this. Headteachers tended to agree with

teaching assistants. However, teachers felt that improved communication between themselves and teaching assistants would make the work of teaching assistants more effective.

Conclusions and recommendations

The differences in the views and experiences of the three groups of respondents, and between the primary and secondary phases provided important insights into the current use of teaching assistants in schools. The findings identified a number of issues that may affect the role of teaching assistants in the future and some key questions to consider.

- Teachers and teaching assistants said there was a lack of time to prepare work with each other. How could time for teachers and teaching assistants to plan work and share information be facilitated?

- Many teaching assistants were unsure about certain aspects of their employment, such as whether their pay structures were set at a local authority level and, although many had job descriptions, a large number of schools were without broader policy statements on the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants. What opportunities are there for new teaching assistants to familiarise themselves with their school and its structure? Do teaching assistants have the same access to information as other school staff?

- Although arrangements for the line management of teaching assistants in schools were clear, the arrangements for organising their professional development were less so. Are day-to-day line management activities and responsibility for the professional development of teaching assistants carried out by different members of staff?

- Although teaching assistants attended a variety of training activities, invitations to participate were not consistent. To what extent are teaching assistants aware of training opportunities available to them? Do they have access to advice about what courses to attend? Should training opportunities for teaching assistants take into account or reflect whether they are employed in the primary or secondary phases?

About the study

The research was based on a recent literature review which focused on the current role of teaching assistants in schools. The review identified a number of areas for further research which were followed up in the current research project. These included establishing the current working conditions of teaching assistants, identifying the tasks they were involved in, the impact they were having in schools, and professional and career development opportunities experienced by teaching assistants. The views of headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants were obtained by means of a questionnaire, distributed to a sample of primary and secondary schools in England and Wales. At least one questionnaire was returned from 327 schools and in over 60 per cent of these schools, questionnaires were completed by the headteacher, at least one teacher and at least one teaching assistant.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This research project is set in the context of increasing debate surrounding the role of teaching assistants and other support staff in schools whose role has been developing over a number of years. An adult presence in the classroom, other than that of a qualified teacher, has been the norm for some time. However, in special schools the role has been more diverse, with support staff delivering a much wider spectrum of support to both pupils and teachers.

Over the past decade there has been a gradual increase in the number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) receiving their education in mainstream schools. This increasing inclusion of SEN pupils into mainstream education has necessitated the provision of additional levels of support in the classroom – a role largely fulfilled by teaching assistants. More recently a drive by the Government to raise standards in schools and tackle teacher workloads (including the establishment of the General Teaching Council in 2000) has also changed the way teaching assistants are being used and has increased the diversity and range of tasks that they carry out.

The signing of the National Agreement 'Raising Standards – Tackling Workload' (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group, 2003), with the aim of raising standards in schools and freeing up more time for teachers to focus on teaching and learning placed the role of teaching assistants firmly in the spotlights once more. Signatories to the Agreement consisted of a representative cross-section of a number of key partners, including the Government, local authority employers and school workforce unions. The signatories are currently acting together at a national level in the Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG), to oversee implementation of the Agreement.

The changes proposed in the National Agreement include an increased emphasis on providing more opportunities for support staff to access relevant training opportunities, remuneration that reflects levels of training, skills and responsibilities and the introduction of a new 'higher-level teaching assistant' (HLTA) role. Professional Standards for HLTAs have been published by the DfES and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), and set out what is expected of those who wish to take on this additional role (see http://www.useyourheadteach.gov.uk/). A major contractual change is the acknowledgement that teachers should not routinely carry out certain administrative and clerical tasks that will increasingly come under the remit of the support staff role. The Agreement identifies 24 tasks, including:

- collecting money
- chasing pupil absences
- bulk photocopying
- classroom displays
- stocktaking
- cataloguing, preparing, issuing and maintaining equipment and materials.

Further information on the tasks and the National Agreement can be found on the National Remodelling Team's website at http://www.remodelling.org/. A list of these tasks is also set out in Annex 5 of the 2003 *School Teachers' Pay and Conditions* document (DfES, 2003). In addition, The National Joint Council for local government services published guidance on the use of support staff in schools in 2003. This publication provides guidance on training and development, fixed-term contracts and the development of local career structures (National Joint Council for Local Government Services, 2003).

A recent review of the literature on teaching assistants (Lee, 2002), revealed a number of key findings and areas for further research. In particular, there was no definitive job title for those involved in this particular in-school support. Further to this, teaching assistants were employed in a variety of ways, ranging from taking responsibility for supporting aspects of the curriculum through to carrying out administrative tasks. They were also increasingly working with small groups of pupils, rather than being assigned to one particular pupil with identified needs. Lee also identified the need for further research to establish the availability and effectiveness of training opportunities and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teaching assistants, and to establish the effects of the teaching assistant role on teacher workload.

The current project was carried out as part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Educational Research Programme to address a number of areas of further research, as outlined above. It also provided the opportunity to gain a range of views, not only from teaching assistants but also from their colleagues who work alongside them.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The research project had a number of overarching aims. Primarily, it aimed to build on the recent NFER review of literature (Lee, 2002), in order to deliver a concise and comprehensive overview of current developments in this area. In particular, the project aimed to:

- describe the current working conditions of teaching assistants

- identify the range of tasks carried out by teaching assistants

- explore the impact that teaching assistants have within classrooms

- collect views on the opportunities for professional and career development experienced by teaching assistants.

In addition, the research coincided with the beginning of a major phase of school workforce reforms. In recognition of this, the project aimed not only to build on the previous research but also to elicit opinions on the likely impacts of the national agreement on the role of teaching assistants in particular.

1.3 Methodology

The method of data collection was a questionnaire survey to headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools. The NFER liaison officers in each LEA were sent information about the project's aims and requirements, in order to provide confirmation to approach schools within their areas. The questionnaire was piloted in 6 schools (primary and secondary) in May 2003. From the responses received the questionnaire was amended as necessary.

Subsequently, invitations to participate in the questionnaire survey were sent to a random sample of 500 primary schools, 50 of which were in Wales and 300 secondary schools, 20 of which were in Wales. The samples were selected from the NFER's register of schools in England and Wales. Nationally, both primary and secondary school samples were regionally representative. In the primary school sample infant/first schools were slightly over-represented and primary/combined schools were slightly under-represented when compared nationally. The number of junior schools in the sample was representative of the national number of junior schools. LEA type was also broadly represented, the only exception being County authorities which were slightly over-represented in the sample. The secondary school sample was broadly representative by type of secondary school and LEA. The only exceptions were the London Boroughs, which were slightly under-represented in this sample.

Independent, nursery and special schools were not included in the sample. The decision to exclude special schools from the sample

was based on the acknowledgement that the use of teaching assistants in these schools would be very different from their deployment in mainstream schools, which was the main focus of the study.

The invitations to schools were sent at the end of the summer term of 2002/03 with the aim of sending questionnaires to responding schools at the start of the autumn term of 2003/04. The invitations to schools yielded fairly low response rates. In order to improve participation rates, the survey was sent out to those schools that had replied to the initial invitation (Group 1) and to those that did not respond (Group 2), in order to provide a second opportunity for them to take part. Questionnaires were not sent to schools that indicated that they did not wish to participate in the survey. The response rates for both groups are shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.[1]

The distribution of questionnaires reflected a multi-perspective approach whereby teaching assistants, teachers and headteachers were invited to participate in the survey, in order to provide as complete a picture as possible. Within each school, the headteacher and a maximum of three teaching assistants and three teachers, with whom the assistants worked most closely, were invited to respond. Schools were asked to consider a number of elements when deciding who should complete the questionnaires. These included:

- different year groups
- different subject areas
- levels of responsibility.

In order to ensure schools were clear about which school support staff the research was aimed at, they were provided with a definition of 'teaching assistant'. This was defined as any of the following most commonly used terms, as established in the previous study by Lee (2002):

- classroom assistant
- learning support assistant

- special support assistant
- special needs assistant
- specialist teacher assistant.

The research referred to teaching assistants as those individuals who were in paid employment in support of teachers in schools, who were not qualified teachers themselves. This terminology reflects Government guidance (DfEE, 2000). In addition, they may have had a general role or more specific responsibility for a particular child, subject area or age group.

1.3.1 Group 1

The response rates for schools that agreed to participate in the research are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Response rates for schools that agreed to participate

Questionnaire type	Primary schools		Secondary schools	
	Total number received	Response %	Total number received	Response %
Headteachers	162	67	57	53
Teaching assistants (up to three per school)	309	43	161	48
Teachers (up to three per school)	295	41	137	42

1.3.2 Group 2

The response rates for schools that did not reply to the invitation to participate are shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Response rates for schools that did not reply

Questionnaire type	Primary schools		Secondary schools	
	Total number received	Response %	Total number received	Response %
Headteachers	30	18	15	14
Teaching assistants (up to three per school)	60	12	38	12
Teachers (up to three per school)	61	12	42	14

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[1] Response rates include a small number of questionnaires which were returned without identification. These were not included in the analysis.

As would be expected, the response rates from Group 1 were an acceptable level, ranging from 41 to 67 per cent. Response rates were highest from headteachers. A possible reason for lower response rates from teachers and teaching assistants may be because the questionnaires were distributed to them from within the school, whereas headteachers received them directly from the NFER. Another reason for the lower response rate from teachers and teaching assistants is that we were seeking up to six responses per school. Response rates from Group 2 were considerably lower than Group 1, ranging from 12 to 18 per cent. Again the headteacher questionnaire had the highest responses. The overall instrument response rate was 32 per cent. At least one questionnaire was returned from each of 327 schools.

The instructions to distribute questionnaires to various members of staff yielded different combinations of recipients. Figure 1.1 shows the number of questionnaires returned from secondary schools and Figure 1.2 shows the number of questionnaires returned by primary schools. Each circle shows the number of schools where a particular recipient group returned a questionnaire. Where the circles overlap, the figures reflect the number of schools in which combinations of different recipient groups returned questionnaires. For example, we can see in how many schools questionnaires were returned by headteachers alone, where they were returned by headteachers and teachers or headteachers and teaching assistants or by all three groups of respondents.

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show that in most schools, all three respondent groups returned questionnaires. This was the case in 60 secondary schools and 143 primary schools. Fewer schools returned questionnaires from only one or two groups of respondents. Over sixty per cent of the schools we received questionnaires from provided responses from all three groups of respondents.

Figure 1.1 Combinations of respondents from secondary schools

Headteachers

3

5   4

60

1   19   6

Teachers   Teaching assistants
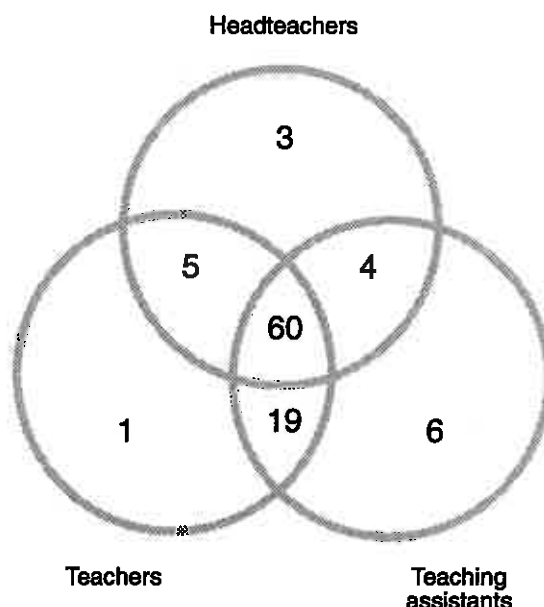
Figure 1.2 Combinations of respondents from primary schools

Headteachers

15

19   15

143

11   21   5

Teachers   Teaching assistants
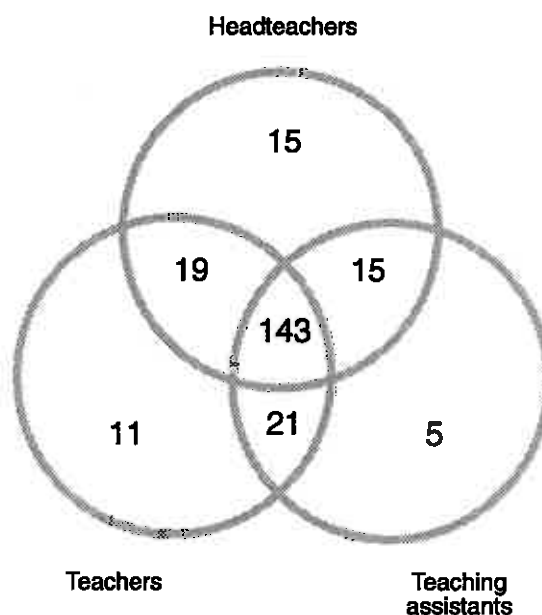
1.4 The structure of the report

The report is structured around the themes identified in the questionnaire. In addition, a number of key questions are identified by the research team, arising from the introduction of the National Agreement. These are presented in the relevant sections, providing a contemporary context within which to illustrate the findings and ensure their relevance to a professional audience.

Throughout the report comparisons are made between the findings from each of the primary and secondary phases. However, schools within each of the phases operate differently and structural differences such as the size of school and the way the school day is organised need to be borne in mind when making such comparisons. It should also be noted that comparisons are also made between the groups of respondents. When making these comparisons percentages are stated and these do not indicate that the two groups have been compared by the use of statistical significance testing.

More questionnaires were sent to primary schools than secondary schools in order to reflect the national spread of schools in each phase. This means that there are greater numbers of respondents from primary compared to secondary schools (Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

2   Characteristics of teaching assistants and the schools in which they work

This chapter illustrates the main characteristics of the schools, teachers and the teaching assistants who replied to the questionnaires. It aims to provide a context within which to locate the subsequent sections of the report by outlining details such as the gender and age profile of teaching assistants and the numbers of pupils in the schools in which they are employed.

2.1   Teaching assistant characteristics

Teaching assistants were asked to provide a number of background details, such as: age, gender, job title, whether they spoke an additional language to English and if they held any caring responsibilities outside school e.g. care of an elderly parent or relative. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate the highest responses provided by teaching assistants in each of the information categories.

Analysis of the most frequent responses from teaching assistants told us that they were usually female, aged between 41 and 50, did not speak any additional languages and had caring responsibilities outside of school. They also mentioned a wide range of job titles. The most frequent response was teaching assistant. The second most commonly reported job title was learning support assistant (28 per cent), followed by classroom assistant (8 per cent). In total, 48 different job titles were reported.

Almost half of teaching assistants were aged 41–50, just over a quarter reported that they were aged 31–40 and 18 per cent were aged 51–60. Fewer teaching assistants were aged 18–30. Most respondents were female, although this varied according to school type: in the primary schools one per cent of

respondents were male and at secondary level 4 per cent were male. Although the majority of teaching assistants did not speak an additional language, 13 per cent of primary teaching assistants and 25 per cent of those in secondary schools said they did. French was the most frequently reported additional language (55 per cent) followed by British Sign Language (BSL) (23 per cent) and German (10 per cent).

Table 2.1   Characteristics of primary teaching assistants

Characteristic type	Most frequent response	Percentage response %
Job title	Teaching assistant	40
Age group (years)	41–50	48
Gender	Female	99
Additional language other than English	No	85
Caring responsibilities	Yes	71
N = 373		

Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Table 2.2   Characteristics of secondary teaching assistants

Characteristic type	Most frequent response	Percentage response %
Job title	Teaching assistant	34
Age group (years)	41–50	47
Gender	Female	96
Additional language other than English	No	70
Caring responsibilities	Yes	76
N = 201		

Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants were also asked to identify any additional responsibilities they held within their school. A variety of

responsibilities were reported, further information is given in Appendix 2.

reported by respondent teachers in secondary schools.

2.2 Teacher characteristics

Teachers who responded to the survey were asked to provide details of the subjects or year groups which they taught and any school responsibilities they held.

2.2.1 Primary teachers

In primary schools, teachers who completed the questionnaire were most likely to teach reception (14 per cent) or year 2 (14 per cent). However, we had responses from teachers ranging from nursery through to year 6.

In primary schools, the teachers most likely to complete the questionnaires were subject coordinators (69 per cent). The second most frequent responsibility held was deputy head (14 per cent), followed by Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) (12 per cent). In addition to these, a wide range of other roles were also mentioned. Each of the following was reported by less than ten per cent of teachers: early years coordinator, class teacher, senior teacher and assessment coordinator.

2.2.2 Secondary teachers

In secondary schools, the teachers who responded to the questionnaires most commonly taught English (19 per cent), followed by mathematics (18 per cent) and science (14 per cent). Although these were the main subjects teachers said they taught, a wide range of subjects was mentioned. These included: art and design, modern foreign languages, religious education and design and technology. Each of these was mentioned by less than five per cent of teachers.

In secondary schools, 27 per cent of teachers reported they had subject coordinator or head of department responsibilities and 15 per cent said they were the SENCO. These were the most common responsibilities

2.3 School characteristics

Headteachers were asked to provide various details about their schools. These included: number of pupils on roll, numbers of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) teaching staff, how many FTE staff worked as teaching assistants and the total number of teaching assistants they employed in their school. This information was requested in order to contextualise the findings from the remainder of the questionnaire. Table 2.3 shows the averages for each of the characteristics. The median average is used wherever averages are referred to throughout the report. It provides a more accurate measure of averages as it is less influenced by very small or large numbers within the data.

Table 2.3 Characteristics of schools

Characteristics:	Headteacher responses (median)	
	Primary	Secondary
Number of pupils on roll	192	995
Number of FTE teaching staff in school	8	60
Number of FTE staff working as teaching assistants in schools	4	8
Number of people working as teaching assistants in schools	6	10
	N = 192	N = 72

Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – headteacher questionnaire

As would be expected, secondary schools had more pupils, employed more teaching staff and tended to have more people working as teaching assistants. In addition, headteachers were also asked if their school had Investors in People status. This was more common in secondary schools. Just over a third of primary headteachers and just under three quarters of secondary school headteachers said their schools had been awarded Investors in People.

3 Employment of teaching assistants

This chapter outlines the employment conditions of teaching assistants. In particular, it explores the employment contracts and salary levels of teaching assistants and the existence of school-level policies which outline their roles. In addition, it provides details on the line management of teaching assistants and the existence of job descriptions.

This chapter will consider the following questions.

> • Do teaching assistants' salaries reflect their level of skills, training and responsibility?
>
> • Do schools have written job descriptions for teaching assistants?
>
> • Are there whole-school policies on the use of teaching assistants?

3.1 Number of teaching assistants

Headteachers were asked to provide details about the number of teaching assistants working in their school. Overall, primary schools employed fewer teaching assistants than secondary schools. The median number of teaching assistants was six in primary schools and ten in secondary schools.

Combining this information together with information headteachers provided about the median number of pupils in primary and secondary schools, the ratio of teaching assistants to pupils was calculated. In primary schools this averaged as one teaching assistant to every 25 pupils and in secondary schools there was an average of one teaching assistant to every 99 pupils.

3.2 Local authority pay structures

According to both primary and secondary headteacher respondents, the majority (90 per cent) reported that their local authorities set out a pay structure for teaching assistants.[2] Of the overwhelming majority of headteachers who said their local authority did have a pay structure, 96 per cent reported that they used it in their school. Responses from teaching assistants highlighted that they were less sure about the existence of pay structures within their local authorities. Sixty-three per cent of teaching assistants replied that their local authority set out a pay structure for teaching assistants and 91 per cent of these reported that their school used this structure.

Many of the teaching assistants who completed the questionnaire commented on the inadequacy of pay structures: 'My job description grew, the workload doubled... my salary stayed the same'; 'Different levels of teaching assistants [should be] linked to different pay structures'; and 'In restructuring the new salary bands, why have relevant qualifications and experience not been taken into account?' It is evident from such accounts that some teaching assistants feel that pay structures lack clarity and would benefit from clearer guidance and definition.

3.3 Salary levels

The questionnaire contained some simple questions regarding salaries. Teaching assistants were asked to indicate their approximate annual salary and the number of hours they worked per week. The guidance which accompanied this question was: 'This

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[2] In line with official guidance, all local authorities set general pay structures for school support staff.

should be the actual salary you receive for the number of hours you work'.

Generally, teaching assistants working in the secondary phase received slightly higher annual pay than teaching assistants from the primary phase (primary teaching assistants received a median average of £6978, whilst teaching assistants in secondary schools received a median average of £8568). As would be expected, teaching assistants who worked longer hours received higher salaries. Teaching assistants in secondary schools generally worked more hours than their colleagues in primary schools and tended to report higher salaries. Forty per cent of primary teaching assistants were employed for more than 25 hours per week during term time compared to 58 per cent in secondary schools. Twenty-two per cent of primary teaching assistants were employed for 15 hours or less a week, during term time, compared with six per cent of teaching assistants in secondary schools.

The nature of the information requested about salaries and hours worked makes it difficult to analyse the data further. The fact that the information about hours worked was provided in bands e.g. 15 hours or less, 16 to 25 hours etc. meant that we could not reliably correlate hours worked against earnings. However, there was a general pattern that the more hours a teaching assistant worked the more their salaries increased.

A number of comments from teaching assistants highlighted the general issues which surrounded the issue of salary levels. A teaching assistant in a primary school said 'Isn't it about time we were appreciated and not paid to the level of the catering or cleaning staff?'

In a secondary school, another teaching assistant made the following comment:

> Our pay is demeaning, embarrassing and engenders poor self-esteem combined with lack of status both within the school and in wider spaces. We are too often perceived as

'failed teachers'. Are all nurses 'failed doctors'?

A teaching assistant in another primary school said simply: 'The salary does not equate with the workload and responsibility'.

A number of teaching assistants also spoke about the additional, unpaid time they worked. The questionnaire provided several opportunities for teaching assistants to express their views and several of them were concerned about this issue. A primary teaching assistant said: 'All teaching assistants do much more hours than they are paid for' and in another primary school, the teaching assistant confirmed how she felt about the additional hours she worked:

> I [should] work 27 hours a week but I always work 30 and it is almost expected of me. If I say I am leaving on time I get some strange looks.

Teaching assistants' concerns about low pay were echoed by teachers and headteachers who completed the questionnaire. In one primary school, the headteacher said 'The DfES needs to introduce a National Pay and Progression structure with an incremental scale and suitable career progression'. And a primary teacher explained: 'I feel so embarrassed that they are paid so little for all their skills and in a small school have no chance of a career structure'.

Salary levels are a complex area, which was only touched on in the survey. The findings from simple questions contained in this questionnaire cannot in any way reliably correlate salary level with the skills, training and responsibility which teaching assistants possess. Nevertheless, low pay was clearly an issue. The comments above are representative of the types of issues which are prevalent in schools in regards to teaching assistant pay scales. These issues are highlighted across both phases and by all groups of respondents i.e. teaching assistants, teachers and headteachers. The desire to see salary scales that recognise variations in skills, training and

qualifications and different levels of responsibility, seems to be of paramount importance amongst those who responded to the questionnaires.

3.4 Employment contracts

Teaching assistants were asked to provide information about the type of contract on which they were employed in their school. They were provided with a number of response options and the opportunity to provide any extra details or information about additional types of contracts which were not listed. The findings are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Employment contracts

Type of contract:	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Permanent all-year	38	31
Permanent term-time only	27	39
Temporary term-time only	14	10
Temporary all-year	13	12
Casual	–	1
Other	6	7
No response	1	1
	N = 373	N = 201

A single response item
Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants reported that they were most commonly employed on permanent contracts either on an all-year or term-time only basis. Thirty-six per cent of all teaching assistants were employed on a permanent all-year contract and a further 31 per cent were employed on permanent term-time contracts. As Table 3.1 shows, permanent all-year contracts were slightly more common in primary schools and permanent term-time contracts were more likely in secondary schools.

Fewer teaching assistants were employed on temporary than permanent contracts. In some cases, teaching assistants provided additional information about their particular circumstances. One primary teaching assistant who was employed on a temporary basis wrote: '[There is] no security. Hours can be reduced at any time during the school year. Hours can change each year'. Teaching assistants who were employed on term-time only contracts also said they lacked security. As one primary school teaching assistant explained:

Teaching assistants are unhappy with the term-time contract, which effectively renders teaching assistants unemployed [and] without pay for a large portion of the year.

If such statements are representative of a wider audience then the issues of the employment of teaching assistants on contracts which are not permanent may be an area which merits consideration in the future.

Few respondents provided additional details of their contract of employment. Six per cent of teaching assistants reported that they were employed on contracts which were in addition to those options provided in the questionnaire. These included fixed-term contracts and contracts where the teaching assistant provided support to a particular pupil whilst they remained in that particular school.

3.5 Existence of job descriptions

Both headteachers and teaching assistants were asked whether all teaching assistants in their school had written job descriptions. Eighty-seven per cent of all headteachers surveyed said that the teaching assistants employed in their schools had written job descriptions. Eleven per cent said that teaching assistants did not have a written job description and two per cent were not sure. Not surprisingly, this finding was mirrored by the teaching assistants surveyed, 80 per cent of whom replied that they did have a written job description, 15 per cent did not and four per cent were not sure.

3.6 School policies on the roles of teaching assistants

The survey asked headteachers and teaching assistants if their school had a policy or written guidance on the roles of teaching assistants. Table 3.2 shows the responses to this question.

Fifty-four per cent of all teaching assistants reported that their school had a policy or written guidance on the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants. Just under half of headteachers agreed with this (42 per cent). If teaching assistants identified such policies they were also asked whether they felt these were applied consistently throughout the school, 71 per cent thought that they were. This opinion was more common in primary than secondary schools. Eighty-one per cent of primary teaching assistants felt that such policies were applied consistently throughout their school, but only just over half (54 per cent) of secondary teaching assistants agreed with this.

Table 3.2 The existence of whole school policies on the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants

Existence of policies/ written guidance:	Teaching assistant responses %
Yes	54
No	26
Not sure	18
No response	2
N= 574	

A single response item
Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

The difference between the primary and secondary phase may be attributable to secondary schools being larger institutions and therefore making it harder to apply a policy such as this consistently throughout the school.

Schools were invited to return copies of their policies with their completed questionnaires. Eight policy documents were received and contained a range of information on teaching assistants' roles and responsibilities. Further details are given in Appendix 1.

Where schools did not have a written policy which defined the roles of teaching assistants, they were asked whether they felt it was the responsibility of teachers and teaching assistants to work together in order to establish effective working strategies. The majority of teaching assistants (89 per cent) asserted that it was the responsibility of each teacher (and assistant) to decide how they would work together. However, finding the time to do this was often difficult. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

3.7 Line management responsibilities

We were interested to know who had line management responsibility for teaching assistants. Both headteachers and teaching assistants were asked to indicate who held this responsibility in their school. Table 3.3 shows the pattern of responses.

Table 3.3 Line management of teaching assistants

Line manager:	Headteacher and teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Headteacher	81	13
SENCO	33	84
Deputy/assistant headteacher	30	21
Head of key stage/year group	15	6
Other senior teacher	7	9
Senior teaching assistant	4	8
Other	5	6
No response	–	2
	N = 985	N = 406

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – headteacher and teaching assistant questionnaires

In primary schools, the headteacher was most likely to line manage teaching assistants (81 per cent) and in secondary schools it was more likely to be the SENCO (84 per cent).

The differences in line management between primary and secondary schools could be due to different ways of deploying teaching assistants in the two phases or differences in the organisational structures of the schools. For example, the research found that teaching assistants in secondary schools were more likely to work with pupils with special needs (Section 4), therefore it would follow that they would be line managed by the SENCO. In primary schools, where there are fewer members of senior staff, it is more likely that the headteacher would undertake this role.

A few teaching assistants took the opportunity to comment on their particular experiences of line management, making comments such as 'line managers [are] not utilising teaching assistants'. In some cases, respondents made recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the line manager role. A secondary headteacher explained:

I would like to see us employing a few more Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and the team being managed by a senior LSA. This would increase opportunities for planning and CPD and relieve the SENCO of the day-to-day management of LSAs.

The evidence from this survey would seem to indicate that the line management of teaching assistants could benefit from further clarification. Section 133 regulations issued under the Education Act 2002 (England and Wales. Statutes, 2002) state that qualified teachers should not necessarily undertake any line management of support staff. However, line management responsibilities can range from dealing with day-to-day matters to undertaking performance management. What is unclear from the questionnaire findings is to what extent qualified teachers, other than senior managers, are undertaking some line management responsibilities for teaching assistants. This issue is discussed further in relation to the professional development of teaching assistants in Chapter 5.

4 Deployment of teaching assistants

This chapter focuses on the ways in which teaching assistants are allocated to work in schools. This includes: the pupils they work with; their distribution throughout the school; responsibilities for whole-class supervision; and the tasks which they carry out. In addition, opinions on the role of teaching assistants in relation to the National Agreement on workloads are also discussed.

This chapter considers the following questions.

- To what extent are teaching assistants undertaking the administrative tasks highlighted in the National Agreement?

- Are teaching assistants covering whole classes in the absence of a teacher?

- What are the most important skills which teaching assistants need to support pupils?

4.1 Use of teaching assistant support in schools

Teachers were asked to indicate the maximum number of teaching assistants who generally supported in their class. Table 4.1 shows how teachers responded to this question.

As expected, the majority of teachers surveyed (70 per cent) said that they had a maximum of one teaching assistant present in their class. This finding reflected the fact that the questionnaires were sent to schools with the request that they were distributed to those teachers who worked most closely with teaching assistants. Interestingly, some teachers indicated that they worked with more than one teaching assistant. As Table 4.1 shows, 19 per cent of primary teachers and 22 per cent of secondary teachers said that they

received support from two teaching assistants. Further to this, in-class support from three teaching assistants was reported by four per cent of teachers in primary schools and eight per cent in secondary schools. However two per cent of teachers in primary schools, and the same in secondary schools reported that they did not work with any teaching assistants at all.

Table 4.1 Number of teaching assistants providing in-class support

Number of teaching assistants per class	Teacher responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
0	2	2
1	72	66
2	19	22
3	4	8
4	1	–
5	1	–
No response	2	2
	N = 359	N = 180

Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100

Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teacher questionnaire

Teachers were also asked how often they experienced teaching assistant support in their classes. The results are presented in Table 4.2.

Secondary school classes were most often supported for 'some of the day some days' (54 per cent), whilst primary school classes were most often supported 'some of the day, every day' (41 per cent). However, as already established, the teachers responding to this questionnaire were those experiencing the most contact with teaching assistants in their schools. It follows that responses such as 'occasionally' 'rarely' and 'never' would be low. An interesting point to note is the difference in the frequency of teaching assistant support between primary and secondary schools. Primary teachers were

more likely to receive some support every day whereas teachers in secondary schools were more likely to receive support less frequently.

Table 4.2 Frequency of teaching assistant in-class support

How often teaching assistants support in class	Teacher responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Some of the day, every day	41	14
All day, every day	34	2
Some of the day, some days	14	54
All day, some days	7	1
Occasionally	2	21
Rarely	1	4
Never	<1	1
No response	1	2
	N = 359	N = 180

A series of single response items
Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teacher questionnaire

In addition, teachers were asked whether they felt their allocation of teaching assistant support was appropriate. Around half the teachers (53 per cent) felt that their allocation was 'about right'. This was more often the case for primary teachers (56 per cent) than secondary teachers (47 per cent). Fifty-one per cent of secondary teachers felt that they did not have a large enough allocation of teaching assistants for their current classes.

4.2 How teaching assistants are allocated to work

Headteachers were asked to indicate the ways in which teaching assistants were allocated to work in their school, for example with individual pupils or particular year groups. They were provided with a set of possible response options and the opportunity to provide additional responses.

Headteachers in both phases most frequently reported that teaching assistants worked with an individual specified pupil or pupils. This was more prevalent in the responses from secondary headteachers. Almost all (99 per cent) secondary headteachers said that teaching assistants in their schools worked with individual specified pupils, compared with 93 per cent of headteachers in primary schools. Headteachers reported the second most frequent way in which teaching assistants were allocated within their schools was to work with a specified class or teacher. This was indicated by 86 per cent of headteachers and was more commonly reported in the primary than secondary phase, 91 per cent and 75 per cent respectively.

When headteachers were asked whether teaching assistants in their school worked with a particular or a variety of year groups, the responses varied. Similar numbers of headteachers in both the primary and secondary phases reported that teaching assistants worked with particular year groups, just over a half of respondents in both phases indicated this. However, working with a variety of year groups was more prominent in the secondary phase. Headteachers in secondary schools were more likely than those in primary schools to say that teaching assistants in their school worked with various year groups. Seventy-six per cent of secondary headteachers reported this to be the case compared with 53 per cent of those in primary schools.

4.2.1 Pupils with whom teaching assistants work

We also wanted to ascertain the range of pupils with whom teaching assistants worked. Teaching assistants were asked to provide information about which year groups they worked with and if they worked with pupils with special needs. Teaching assistants were able to provide more than one answer. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the range of different classes and year groups to which teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools were allocated. The percentage of SEN pupils is presented as a separate bar in each figure, as it was provided as a separate response option in the questionnaire.

However, this group of pupils could fall into any or all of the year groups in both primary and secondary schools.

From the graphs it is apparent that a large number of teaching assistants in both primary and secondary schools worked with pupils with special educational needs. This was particularly pronounced in the secondary schools (69 per cent) compared with the primary schools (46 per cent). The high level of support for pupils with special needs, particularly in secondary schools, also ties in with the findings from Chapter 3 which reports the tendency for line management responsibilities to be undertaken by the SENCO. In addition, Figure 4.1 shows there was a high level of pupil support in the Foundation Stage (year 1–2). Support was also high in the transition period (year 7) and key stage 3 (year 9) as shown in Figure 4.2.

The fact that teaching assistants indicated each of the year groups they worked with meant that this information could be manipulated further, in order to provide information about the total number of year groups teaching assistants supported. Table 4.3 presents these findings.

Table 4.3 Number of year groups with which teaching assistants work

Number of year groups	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
1	28	8
2	35	8
3	5	21
4	12	16
5	2	42
6	5	3
No specific year group	13	1
No response	–	1
	N = 373	N = 201

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Figure 4.1 Year groups with whom teaching assistants worked with in primary schools
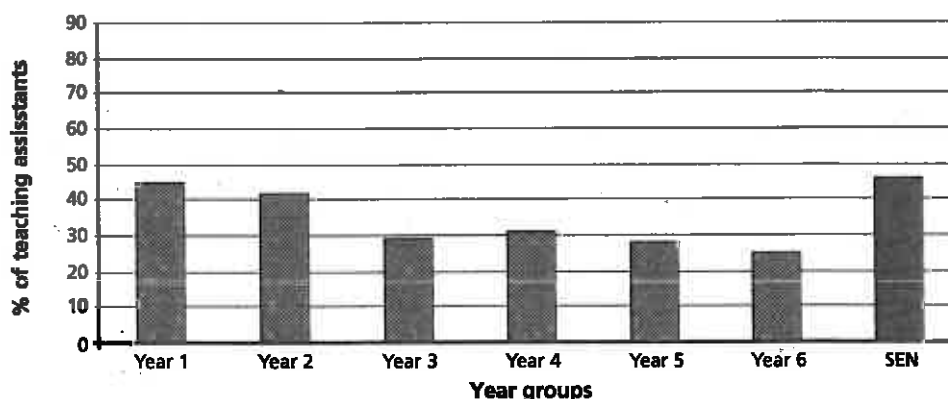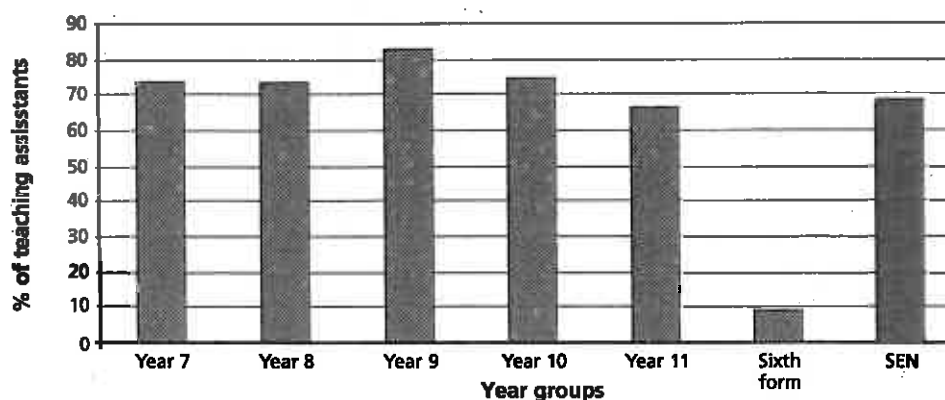

Figure 4.2 Year groups with whom teaching assistants worked with in secondary schools

In the main, teaching assistants tended to work with more than one year group. This was particularly evident at secondary level. Forty-two per cent of secondary teaching assistants worked with five different year groups compared with two per cent of primary teaching assistants. Teaching assistants in primary schools were more likely to divide their time between year groups.

4.2.2 Areas supported by teaching assistants

Headteachers and teachers were asked to provide examples of any ways in which they felt that the use of teaching assistants had had a positive impact on pupil performance. These were open-ended questions which elicited a wide range of responses. In addition to providing information on the impacts of teaching assistants on pupil performance which are presented in Chapter 6, respondents outlined how teaching assistants had contributed to these impacts and the areas of work in which they were involved. These included the following:

- curriculum support
  - literacy and numeracy support
  - help with handwriting and letter formation
  - supporting pupils to remain on-task
  - helping pupils with coursework

- behavioural and emotional support
  - offering praise and reinforcement of positive behaviour
  - provision of pastoral support
  - mentoring/counselling
  - family liaison
  - improving pupil self-esteem

- special needs support
  - helping manage the delivery of differentiated work
  - supporting pupils with special needs e.g. Asperger's Syndrome
  - supporting pupils with physical impairments.

4.2.3 Whole-class supervision

Headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants were asked how often teaching assistants worked with the whole class in the teacher's absence. Table 4.4 shows the responses of teaching assistants from both primary and secondary schools.

Table 4.4 How often teaching assistants work with the whole class in the teacher's absence

Frequency	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Occasionally	50	40
Never	32	48
Sometimes	12	7
Regularly	6	5
No response	1	1
	N = 373	N = 201

A single response item

Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100

Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

The table shows that the majority of teaching assistants felt that they provided occasional cover for teachers or were not called on at all to deliver whole-class support in the absence of the teacher. Only six per cent of primary teaching assistants and five per cent of those in secondary schools said that they regularly worked with whole classes in the absence of a teacher.

The responses provided by teaching assistants were then compared with those of headteachers and teachers. In both primary and secondary schools, headteachers and teachers were largely in agreement with teaching assistants in maintaining the view that teaching assistants were not regularly called upon to work with whole classes in the absence of a teacher. Whereas teaching assistants most frequently reported that they provided occasional cover, the responses from headteachers and teachers in both phases were more likely to refer to teaching assistants never providing cover for whole classes in the absence of a teacher. Eleven per cent of secondary headteachers and nine per

cent of teachers in secondary schools said that teaching assistants provided cover occasionally. This is compared with 40 per cent of teaching assistants in this phase. Eighty-five per cent of headteachers in secondary schools and 88 per cent of secondary teachers reported that teaching assistants never provided cover compared with 48 per cent of teaching assistants in secondary schools.

Responses within primary schools also reflected similar differences between the respondents. Again, fewer headteachers and teachers than teaching assistants felt that teaching assistants were occasionally asked to provide cover. Thirty-eight per cent of headteachers and 32 per cent of teachers chose this option compared with 50 per cent of teaching assistants. And, as reflected in the secondary school responses, more headteachers and teachers than teaching assistants felt that teaching assistants never provided whole class cover in the absence of a teacher. Fifty-five per cent of headteachers and 58 per cent of teachers stated this compared with 32 per cent of teaching assistants.

The discrepancies between the views of the different respondents mainly surround the issue of teaching assistants providing occasional cover or providing no cover at all. Headteachers and teachers were more likely to state the latter option, especially in secondary schools, where almost twice as many headteacher and teachers than teaching assistants reported this. These discrepancies may be attributed partly to the design of the questionnaires and partly in acknowledging the various perspectives held by each of the different groups of respondents. The questionnaire did not ask respondents to provide information on the length of time that teaching assistants worked with a whole class without the presence of the teacher. Therefore, a teaching assistant may cover a class for 10 minutes at the start of a lesson and hence tick the 'occasionally box', however the teacher may not view this 10 minute favour as cover and therefore tick the 'never' box. The definition

of what constitutes 'occasional' support may be quite different between headteachers and teachers and teaching assistants. The issue of teaching assistants taking a class without the teacher present is a contentious one. The National Agreement provides extensive guidance on the strategies which schools should adopt to deal with cover for teacher absence.

Respondents were also asked to state the circumstances in which teaching assistants took a whole class. Table 4.5 shows how respondents answered.

Table 4.5 Circumstances in which teaching assistants take the whole class

Circumstance	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
While teacher deals with incident elsewhere	85	87
Unplanned teacher absence	49	55
While teacher attends meeting	33	10
While teacher conducts pupil assessment	32	7
Planned teacher absence	22	11
Other	12	11
No response	1	1
	N = 251	N = 103

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

The table shows that the majority of teaching assistants said that they provided cover while the teacher dealt with an incident elsewhere. Headteachers and teachers agreed with this. The circumstances under which teaching assistants in primary schools were called upon to provide whole-class supervision were slightly more varied than in secondary schools. Teaching assistants in primary schools reported that they were more likely than those in secondary schools to 'cover a class whilst the teacher attended a meeting', 'whilst the teacher conducted a pupil assessment' or in the case of 'planned teacher absence'.

Some respondents took the opportunity to express their concerns about teaching assistants working with the whole class in the teacher's absence:

All the teachers, teaching assistants and governors of this school are extremely concerned about the appropriateness and the practicalities involved in teaching assistants having whole-class teaching responsibility.

(primary headteacher)

Teaching assistants are not teachers. I would not be happy to leave my class in the sole charge of a teaching assistant.

(primary teacher)

The teaching assistants seem reluctant to take whole or even half classes for varied reasons (i.e. discipline, lack of subject knowledge, confidence).

(primary teacher)

It must be reiterated however, that the responses to the questionnaire suggest that teaching assistants are not regularly called on to supervise a class in the absence of a qualified teacher for a significant amount of time. What the findings appear to suggest is the occasional reliance on teaching assistants to supervise a class for a short time whilst the class teacher deals with an incident elsewhere.

4.3 Tasks teaching assistants carry out

All respondents were asked to identify which tasks teaching assistants carried out. A list of tasks was provided, which respondents could tick or they could provide an additional response, if they wished, in the space provided. Only a small number of respondents provided any additional information.

For reporting purposes, the tasks that teaching assistants carried out have been split into five areas; teaching support, monitoring and assessment, pupil support, and administrative tasks. Each of these areas is reported separately in the following sections.

4.3.1 Teaching support

Three tasks were assigned to the category of teaching support because they were deemed to be tasks which involved teaching assistants in the teaching process. The tasks were: team-teaching of the whole class, pre-lesson discussion/planning and post-lesson feedback. The findings are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Teaching assistant tasks which support teaching

Task	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Pre-lesson discussion/ planning	89	65
Post-lesson feedback	83	63
Team-teaching of the whole class	72	41
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Percentage of respondents who said they did that task
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants working in primary schools reported that they were involved in the three tasks which were designated as supporting teaching in some way more frequently than teaching assistants in secondary schools.

Generally, responses from teachers reflected those of the teaching assistants. However, there was slightly more agreement between teachers and teaching assistants in the primary than the secondary sector. The tendency for fewer secondary teaching assistants to participate in pre- and post-lesson discussions may be due to their greater mobility within schools. As reported earlier in the section, teaching assistants in secondary schools are more likely to work with a variety of year groups and teachers. This characteristic of the secondary school day combined with the timetabled structure, may limit opportunities for teaching assistants to participate in these particular tasks.

Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to indicate which of the tasks was

of most benefit to pupils and which benefited teachers the most. Teaching assistants and teachers from both phases felt that post-lesson feedback was of most benefit to teachers, whilst team-teaching and pre-lesson discussions were of most benefit to pupils. Comments such as 'lesson plans [should] be given to teaching assistants in advance, as a matter of policy', were common amongst respondents and highlighted the strength of support for the combined efforts of teachers and teaching assistants in carrying out these tasks.

4.3.2 Monitoring and assessment

Two tasks were identified as providing support for pupil monitoring and assessment. The responses are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Tasks undertaken by teaching assistants which support monitoring and assessment

Task	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Assessment of pupils	85	66
Contributing to IEP development and/ or monitoring	81	75
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Percentage of respondents who said they did that task
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

In the main, teaching assistants working in the primary sector reported more frequently that they were involved in supporting monitoring and assessment than was the case for secondary teaching assistants. Primary teachers supported the responses of the teaching assistants in primary schools; however, teachers in secondary schools felt that the teaching assistants in their school were less likely to be involved in supporting pupil assessment (49 per cent) or contributing to the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) (66 per cent).

Teachers and teaching assistants from both phases felt that assessment of pupils was of

most benefit to teachers whilst contributing to IEP development and/or monitoring was of most benefit to pupils.

4.3.3 Preparation and displays

The provision of support for preparation and display work was separated into two separate tasks as shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Teaching assistant tasks which support classroom preparation and displays

Task	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Preparation of materials/ equipment	97	75
Constructing displays	88	40
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Percentage of respondents who said they did that task
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants working in the primary sector were more likely to be involved in classroom preparation and displays than secondary teaching assistants. The difference between the two sectors was particularly noticeable in providing support to construct displays.

These differences may be due to teaching assistants in primary schools being deployed more often to work with individual specified teachers or classes and therefore more likely to be based in the same classroom. In secondary schools, the greater movement of teaching assistants between classes may limit such opportunities. Although primary teachers generally agreed with teaching assistants, secondary teachers were less likely to agree with the teaching assistants they worked with about the level of support they received in preparing materials and displays. Fifty six per cent of secondary teachers said teaching assistants helped prepare materials and equipment and a further 29 per cent said teaching assistants helped with display work.

4.3.4 Pupil support

There were seven tasks which provided support directly to pupils. The results are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Tasks undertaken by teaching assistants which support pupils

Task	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Work with groups of specified pupils	97	89
Work with individual specified pupil(s)	91	95
Work with groups of pupils outside the classroom	88	71
Work with pupil(s) outside the classroom	81	87
SEN support	76	83
First aid/administer medicine	76	21
Playground duty	74	14
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Percentage of respondents who said they did that task
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

In general, teaching assistants working in both primary and secondary schools supported pupils in a variety of ways. Working with specified pupils, either in groups or individually and working with pupils outside of the classroom was common in both phases. According to the responses from teaching assistants, they were involved in mostly similar tasks which supported pupils, in both the primary and secondary phases. However, teaching assistants in secondary schools were less likely to provide playground duty or administer first aid than those in primary schools. This may be due to pupils' ages and increased responsibility amongst pupils for their own personal conduct at secondary school level. A few teaching assistants questioned the appropriateness of assisting with playground duty 'schools should not insist on your working as a mid-day supervisor – I think this devalues the role which they want to make more professional'.

When responses from teaching assistants were compared with those from teachers there were a number of discrepancies, particularly at secondary level, but in general teachers' and teaching assistant's responses in primary schools were fairly similar. In secondary schools, teachers tended to feel that pupil support provided by teaching assistants was mainly classroom based. They were less inclined to say that teaching assistants provided pupil support outside the classroom, than teaching assistants themselves reported. For instance, 71 per cent of secondary teaching assistants stated that they worked with groups of pupils outside the classroom compared with 47 per cent of secondary teachers. Fewer secondary teachers also felt that teaching assistants provided less special educational needs support than the teaching assistants themselves indicated. Eighty three per cent of teaching assistants in secondary schools compared with 65 per cent of secondary teachers reported that teaching assistants carried out this task.

These reoccurring discrepancies between secondary teachers and the teaching assistants they worked with may be the result of less opportunity and time to develop these working relationships in secondary schools, and ultimately less awareness on the part of teachers as to the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities in which the teaching assistants in their school are involved.

4.3.5 Administrative tasks

All respondents were asked whether teaching assistants carried out a number of administrative tasks: photocopying, collecting money, ordering resources and pursuing absences, all of which are highlighted in the National Agreement. Table 4.10 shows the responses.

Teaching assistants reported that the most common administrative task they carried out was photocopying, which occurred more extensively in primary than secondary schools, 93 per cent compared with 79 per cent, respectively. In addition, teaching assistants

working in the primary phase were slightly more likely to assist with ordering stock and much more likely to help with collecting money than their secondary school colleagues. About a quarter of teaching assistants in both phases said they were involved in pursuing absences.

Table 4.10 Administrative tasks carried out by teaching assistants

Task	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Photocopying	93	79
Ordering stock/resources	41	30
Collecting money	41	12
Pursuing absences	23	26
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Percentage of respondents who said they did that task
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants appeared to be deployed in a variety of ways throughout primary and secondary schools, in tasks which supported many aspects of teaching and learning. A teaching assistant in a primary school encapsulated this finding 'we see our role as a profession in itself, a unique blend of counsellor, teacher and motivator'.

4.4 The most important skills

Teaching assistants and teachers were asked what they felt were the most important personal and professional skills teaching assistants needed in order to support pupils.

4.4.1 Personal skills

The three main personal skills which were identified were: patience (57 per cent of teaching assistants and 49 per cent of teachers), skills in working with children (55 per cent of teaching assistants and 52 per cent of teachers) and communication skills (48 per cent of teaching assistants and 41 per cent of teachers). Also identified were: flexibility, organisation skills, enthusiasm and confidence.

4.4.2 Professional skills

The three main professional skills identified were: subject specific knowledge (48 per cent of teaching assistants and 51 per cent of teachers), pedagogic knowledge (identified by 45 per cent of teaching assistants and 47 per cent of teachers) and communication skills (identified by 33 per cent of teaching assistants and 32 per cent of teachers). Also identified were: flexibility, enthusiasm and understanding child development.

It is interesting to note the similarities between teachers and teaching assistants in their views about which skills they felt were important for teaching assistants to possess. The combination of softer skills, such as communication, teamed with more knowledge specific skills, such as child development and understanding the processes involved in teaching and learning, seemed to be key areas where skills were valued. Other skills mentioned, such as flexibility and enthusiasm, were highlighted as both personal and professional skills, stressing the importance with which such skills are viewed.

4.5 Respondents' views on the National Agreement

The questionnaire invited headteachers and teachers to say if they thought the role of teaching assistants in their school would change from September 2003, with the introduction of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload. The questionnaires were sent to schools at the same time as the first phase of reforms within the Agreement was introduced. It seemed a timely opportunity, therefore, to gain opinion on the perceived impacts of the Agreement on teaching assistants' roles.

Half of the headteachers surveyed (49 per cent) thought that the role of teaching assistants in their school would change from September 2003 with the introduction of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload. Slightly fewer

teachers (36 per cent) felt that the role would change. Responses were very similar between respondents in both the primary and secondary phases.

4.5.1 The effects of the National Agreement on teaching assistant and teacher roles

Respondents were asked to explain how they felt the National Agreement may affect the roles of teaching assistants and teachers in their school. A variety of responses were elicited, which included a mixture of positive and negative suggestions.

Teachers and headteachers felt that some of the positive impacts of the National Agreement would be to:

- affect teaching assistants' pay, working conditions and training positively

- facilitate an increase in responsibilities for teaching assistants

- improve communications between teachers and teaching assistants

- provide teachers with more time.

Comments which reflected these positive views included: 'the whole teaching practice will change with a better status for assistants' (primary headteacher), 'the flexibility should reduce stress and workload for teachers' (primary teacher).

Where respondents felt the National Agreement may affect the roles of teaching assistants in a less positive way, this tended to include: removing teaching assistants from pupil support and placing pressure on school budgets. Comments provided by respondents included:

Our teaching assistants have taken on additional responsibility within the school to move on to the next grade on their pay scale, but this work is to be undertaken during the school day which means class teachers will have less help.

(primary teacher)

LSAs will spend less time helping supporting individual children.

(primary teacher)

Teaching assistants will be expected to do more… however this will be during the existing time as we can't afford to pay any more time for them, or pay for more teaching assistants.

(primary headteacher)

There doesn't seem to be enough money available to support the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload. We need more money to ensure that existing support for children continues whilst support for teachers is improved.

(primary headteacher)

The teachers (55 per cent) and headteachers (49 per cent) who did not think that the role of teaching assistants would change as a result of the National Agreement were asked to explain why not. The most common response from this group was that the teaching assistants in their school were already well deployed (38 per cent of teachers and 62 per cent of headteachers). Other responses included: teaching assistants can not take on any more work, and budget or time constraints would prevent changes taking place.

Although teaching assistants were not specifically asked a question about the National Agreement, a number of teaching assistants provided additional comments about the National Agreement. This was a typical response:

The new workplace agreement has put back the cause of teaching assistants greatly. Now we have all the jobs the teacher wants to rid him/herself of – mainly unskilled labour, too, such as photocopying and collecting money. We don't mind this as part of our role but this is beginning to supersede our usual work. Will we have a teaching assistant to help us?

(teaching assistant)

5 Professional and career development

This chapter explores the existence of policies and structures in schools to support the professional and career development of teaching assistants. It will also highlight the extent and uptake of professional development opportunities that are available to teaching assistants and any difficulties that teaching assistants experience in taking up such opportunities.

This section will look at the following questions.

* Do teaching assistants have access to relevant training opportunities?

* Are teachers involved in the performance management of teaching assistants?

* Are there clear routes for progression in place for teaching assistants?

5.1 School-level policies

Just over half of headteachers (58 per cent) reported that their school had a policy for the professional development of teaching assistants. In addition, almost a third said they would be introducing a policy in the near future. The responses were similar for both primary and secondary schools.

A second question asked headteachers and teaching assistants about the existence of a formal career structure for teaching assistants in their school. Nineteen per cent of headteachers reported that their school had a career structure for teaching assistants whereby they could gain promotion. This could be in the form of increased responsibility for an area of work and/or an increase in salary. The existence of such a career structure was reported slightly more frequently by headteachers in secondary schools.

Nine per cent of teaching assistants in both primary and secondary schools agreed that their school did have a career structure in place. Further to this, 24 per cent of teaching assistants in primary schools and 14 per cent of secondary teaching assistants were unsure of whether their school had a career structure or not. A teaching assistant in one secondary school reported 'I have been on Scale 1 for over ten years. [I have had] no training or incentive offered to improve'.

5.2 Qualifications

Teaching assistants were provided with a list of qualifications and asked to indicate which they had completed or were currently undertaking. The most frequently cited qualification was the City and Guilds Certificate in Learning Support. This was reported by 31 per cent of secondary teaching assistants and 15 per cent of primary teaching assistants. In addition, 55 per cent of primary teaching assistants and 61 per cent of teaching assistants in the secondary phase provided details of qualifications they had undertaken which were not included in the list of qualification options provided.

Of those teaching assistants who provided an additional response, 23 per cent of primary teaching assistants said that they had completed the NVQ in Early Years Care and Education and 14 per cent of secondary teaching assistants cited the NVQ Level 3 for teaching assistants. These were the most frequent responses within each of the phases.

A wide range of additional qualifications was highlighted in this response category, however the number of teaching assistants which were undertaking each of these qualifications was small.

Around a quarter of teaching assistants reported that they had not completed or were not currently involved in any accredited courses. The responses were similar in both primary and secondary schools.

The comments made by teaching assistants revealed some concern about the lack of recognition surrounding non-accredited courses in which they had participated or qualifications they had gained prior to their current role. As one teaching assistant in a primary school said:

> Surely there must be a way to fast-track people like me through the system and give us credit for what we have accomplished already and acknowledge that our skills are transferable?

5.3 Training

Headteachers and teaching assistants were asked a number of questions about the training opportunities which were available to teaching assistants. The questions focused on: access to training and the training in which teaching assistants had participated.

5.3.1 Access to training

Table 5.1 shows how teaching assistants responded.

As shown in Table 5.1, almost half (45 per cent) of teaching assistants who responded to the questionnaire, revealed that they were always invited to attend whole-school training activities, such as INSET. This was more common in secondary than primary schools. Fifty four per cent of secondary teaching assistants said that they were always invited to whole-school training compared with 39 per cent of their primary school colleagues. When looking at training opportunities tailored towards the specific needs of teaching assistants, 34 per cent reported that they were always invited to attend. Responses were higher among teaching assistants in primary schools (38 per cent) than was the case for secondary teaching assistants (28 per cent).

Responses from headteachers provided a slightly different picture. In particular, 71 per cent of primary headteachers reported that teaching assistants were always invited to attend specific courses that were relevant to their role. A similar proportion of secondary headteachers agreed with this.

This difference in perspectives may, in part, be explained by the fact that responsibility for organising and coordinating professional development activities for teaching assistants may not necessarily lie with the headteacher. Therefore, the headteacher responses may

Table 5.1 Training activities that teaching assistants are invited to attend

Training activity:	Teaching assistant responses %					
	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No response
Whole school training (e.g. INSET)	45	16	23	6	7	3
Year group/departmental training	17	9	19	12	25	18
Specific courses for teaching assistants	34	16	29	9	8	4
Other	2	<1	3	1	1	92

N = 574

A series of single response items
Due to rounding errors, percentages may not always sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

reflect a more strategic viewpoint which encompasses the aims and objectives of whole-school CPD policies. It may also be a matter of perception: school managers may feel that CPD activities are open to all staff, but teaching assistants may not feel that they are included.

In the main, it is the responses from the teaching assistants themselves, which highlight the differences in opportunities they experience in attending training courses at their schools. Despite a general paucity of invitations to always attend training, very few teaching assistants reported that they were never invited to participate. Seven per cent of teaching assistants stated that they were never invited to attend whole-school training activities and eight per cent reported never participating in specific courses for teaching assistants. This suggests that on the whole, teaching assistants did experience opportunities to participate in training activities and that the issue is more about the frequency of these opportunities.

5.3.2 Participation in training and professional development activities

We were interested to find out more about the nature of training courses attended by teaching assistants. This is shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 shows a different pattern for primary and secondary teaching assistants. First Aid courses were the most popular type of training undertaken by teaching assistants in primary schools. CPD activities which centred around gaining expertise in working with pupils with learning and/or behavioural difficulties were equally attended by primary and secondary teaching assistants (54 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively) while developing expertise in particular subject areas was slightly more common at primary than secondary level (48 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively). In addition, 45 per cent of secondary teaching assistants reported that they had participated in induction training

compared with 37 per cent of teaching assistants in primary schools.

Table 5.2 Participation in training and CPD activities

CPD activities	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
First Aid	71	30
Development of expertise in pupils with learning and/ or behavioural difficulties	54	55
Development of expertise in particular subjects	48	34
Induction training	37	45
Personal and professional development	35	47
Health and safety	34	27
Child protection	33	30
Assessment, recording and reporting	24	24
Information on school, LEA and national policies	17	21
	N = 373	N = 201

A series of single response items
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Teaching assistants were also asked to identify those activities they had participated in which had been of most help. The training which primary teaching assistants found the most helpful was first aid (64 per cent), whilst for secondary teaching assistants the opportunity to develop skills needed to work more effectively with pupils with special needs was most important (52 per cent).

We also wanted to know in what activities teaching assistants might want to participate in the future. Teaching assistants, at both primary and secondary levels, most frequently said that they would like the opportunity to participate in CPD activities that focused on child protection (36 per cent). Where teaching assistants had reported that they had not attended induction training, only nine per cent, in each phase, felt that it was something they would like to do. However, this response may have been influenced by the fact that these teaching assistants had been in their

role for some time and therefore would not find a course of induction helpful at this stage.

Teachers were also asked to identify whether they had received any training on how to work effectively with teaching assistants. In the cases where teachers had received training, 41 per cent of those in secondary schools had undertaken such training compared with 36 per cent of teachers in primary schools. Almost every teacher who attended the training felt it was useful. In addition, teachers were also asked to identify further training they would find helpful in relation to working with teaching assistants. In some cases, they highlighted specific areas of training, such as how to delegate appropriate tasks to teaching assistants or how to use them more effectively and in other cases they highlighted more pragmatic needs such as having access to the job descriptions of teaching assistants.

A teacher gave an example of the practices employed in her school which supported effective teacher/teaching assistant working relationships. This comprised a combination of the following methods:

● there was no formal training but the school had produced a guide to working with teaching assistants

● new teaching assistants were encouraged to attend induction training

○ information acquired through attendance at courses in connection with effective teacher/teaching assistant working was cascaded to other members of staff.

A small number of teaching assistants were also keen to highlight the two-way process involved in the transfer of knowledge, in that not only should teaching assistants be the recipients of training and professional development activities but in many cases they themselves had several years of experience and expertise to deliver to others.

A teaching assistant in one secondary school said 'We have a wealth of knowledge that is not often used, we are looked down upon'.

5.4 Professional development

5.4.1 Responsibility for professional development

Both headteachers and teachers were asked whether teachers were responsible for leading or organising CPD opportunities for teaching assistants. In general, teachers reported that they were not responsible for leading or organising CPD opportunities for teaching assistants. Only 18 per cent of primary teachers said they held this responsibility, compared with 21 per cent of secondary teachers. However, headteachers answered slightly differently. Fifty-two per cent of primary headteachers completing the survey said that teachers did hold this responsibility, compared with three-quarters of secondary headteachers.

This may be due to the fact that the teachers responding to the questionnaires were not responsible for the line management of teaching assistants or did not have any professional development responsibilities for them. As referred to in Chapter 3, it may also be the case that the day-to-day aspects of line managing and the responsibility for professional development are held by different members of staff, therefore it would be of interest in future research to target more effectively line managers and/or members of staff with professional development responsibilities for teaching assistants, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the structure of this particular area.

5.4.2 Views on the benefits of professional development activities for teaching assistants

Teachers were asked to identify which they felt were the most beneficial activities for teaching assistants to attend. Table 5.3 shows the findings.

The most common response by teachers across both phases, was the development of expertise in working with pupils with learning and/or behavioural difficulties. This was reported by more than half of primary teachers and almost three-quarters of secondary teachers. As highlighted in Chapter 4, this is an area in which teaching assistants were already experiencing training. One explanation for this may be the move towards educating increasing numbers of pupils with a range of special needs in mainstream classrooms, therefore placing a greater demand on schools to tailor and deliver individual pupil support programmes in order to reflect an increasing diversity of learning needs. The fact that teachers identified this need, which is concurrent with the activities in which teaching assistants were most frequently involved, highlights the value of gaining these skills.

Teachers in both phases agreed on the CPD activities they felt were most beneficial for teaching assistants. The only discrepancy appears to be the importance of first aid training courses, which were favoured more highly amongst primary school teachers. This is in line with the findings in Chapter 4, that first aid courses had a higher uptake amongst primary than secondary teaching assistants.

5.4.3 Barriers to teaching assistants attending professional development activities

In order to discover what, if any, barriers existed which might prevent teaching assistants participating in professional development activities, headteachers and teaching assistants were asked to indicate any reasons which they felt could explain low or non-attendance at such events. The responses from teaching assistants are presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.3 Beneficial CPD activities for teaching assistants

CPD activities	Teacher responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Development of expertise in working with pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties	58	73
Development of expertise in particular subjects	45	65
Personal and professional development	42	34
Assessment, recording and reporting	30	21
First aid	25	13
Child protection	25	29
Health and safety	18	18
Induction training	11	21
Information on school, LEA and national policies	11	17
Other	5	5
No response	3	1
	N = 359	N = 180

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teacher questionnaire

Table 5.4 Difficulties attending CPD activities

CPD activities	Teaching assistant responses %
School cannot afford courses for me	23
Not invited or expected to participate	20
Do not get paid for CPD activities	13
Child care/family commitments	13
Cannot manage after-school sessions	12
Sessions are irrelevant/ not appropriate	11
School has problems finding courses for me	7
Cannot manage/afford travel to off-site sessions	5
School will not let me go during the day	5
Not interested in participating	2
Do not have the time	2
Other	15
No response	37
N = 574	

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

As the table shows, teaching assistants reported that the main difficulties they had experienced included: not being invited to participate by their school and difficulties finding funding for them to attend courses. Difficulty in funding courses for teaching assistants was reported slightly more frequently by teaching assistants working in secondary schools. Thirty-two per cent of secondary teaching assistants compared with 19 per cent of primary teaching assistants cited lack of funding as a problem.

On the whole, headteachers felt that teaching assistants had or were participating in CPD activities. Almost three quarters of secondary headteachers and just over a half of primary headteachers expressed this opinion. However, where headteachers did acknowledge low participation in CPD opportunities amongst teaching assistants, they generally expressed different views from teaching assistants about the difficulties which prevented some from accessing and attending professional development activities.

Headteachers were more likely to identify the difficulty as the time at which activities were scheduled and child-care and family commitments. Indeed, such activities were more likely to occur outside school hours. Teaching assistants, on the other hand, felt their non-attendance was the result of insufficient funding or because they were not invited to attend professional development activities by the school. On the basis of the responses from teaching assistants it seemed that the main issues for them were school-based and related to problems providing courses rather than more practical barriers.

Teaching assistants were also asked to provide examples of changes that could be made which would encourage and support them to participate in CPD activities. Increased funding for courses was cited by teaching assistants as the change which was most needed to encourage and support their participation. Twenty-three per cent of teaching assistants said this. In addition 16 per

cent of teaching assistants commented that the provision of an improved career structure in which their involvement in such activities was acknowledged, would encourage them to participate in CPD. A further ten per cent felt that the accessibility of courses could be improved by arranging them at more convenient times.

5.4.4 Future career development

We were interested to find out the views of teaching assistants on their future career development. The questionnaire included a question asking teaching assistants where they thought they would be working in one and five years time. The findings are presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Future career development

Employment status	Teaching assistant responses %	
	One year	Five years
In the same teaching assistant post as now	75	18
Don't know	7	29
In a more senior assistant post	6	20
Other school-based employment, e.g. learning mentor	2	4
Employed, but not in a school	1	8
Qualified as a teacher at the same school	< 1	2
In a similar position to now, but in another school	< 1	2
In a more senior assistant post in another school	< 1	2
Retired	< 1	5
Qualified as a teacher at another school	—	3
Not employed	—	< 1
No response	6	7
N = 574		

A series of single response items
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

Three quarters of teaching assistants anticipated that they would be in their current posts in a years time. This was slightly

more evident amongst primary teaching assistants (79 per cent) than teaching assistants in secondary schools (69 per cent). These findings seem to imply a general consensus that respondents felt content in their current posts, for the short-term at least. In the longer term, in five years time, 15 per cent of secondary teaching assistants reported that they would remain in their current posts compared with 19 per cent of primary teaching assistants.

This decline in figures needs to be contextualised by the fact that around a quarter of teaching assistants simply were unsure of their career plans in five years time and may indeed remain in the profession. It must also be noted that more than half of the teaching assistants who responded to these questionnaires had been in post over three years and that almost half of respondents were in the 41-50 years age bracket.

When asked if teaching assistants envisaged themselves in a more senior assistant post in a years time, ten per cent of secondary teaching assistants thought they would have been promoted compared with four per cent at primary level. When compared with teaching assistants' expectations about whether they could see themselves in a more senior assistant post in five years time, 19 per cent of secondary teaching assistants and 20 per cent of primary teaching assistants said they could. Whilst this suggests that some teaching assistants do anticipate progressing to more senior assistant levels, approximately three quarters of respondents did not consider this as a likely long-term option. In addition, very few teaching assistants who responded to the survey could see themselves as gaining qualified teacher status, either in a year or five years' time.

The findings described in Chapter 4 about the existence of a career structure in schools for teaching assistants may provide, in part, a possible rationale behind the reticence of teaching assistants, that responded to the survey, to outline their long-term career plans. Over half of teaching assistants reported that their school did not have a career structure in place for teaching assistants through which they could gain promotion and a fifth were unsure whether their schools had one or not. Schools seemed more likely to have in place policies for the professional development of teaching assistants but were less likely to have developed a structure which outlined clear routes for progression and promotion.

Respondents were also invited to provide any additional information or comments at the end of the questionnaire. Some of the responses focused on career development. One secondary teaching assistant explained:

I sometimes feel undervalued and frustrated as there is no scope for promotion. I feel different levels with different responsibility points would be useful.

Other responses highlighted the desire amongst teaching assistants to gain professional acknowledgement of their role, in particular:

It is important that the job of teaching assistant becomes recognised as a career, rather than its current status as a bit of pocket money for housewives or a step on the ladder to being a teacher.

In considering these findings, it is interesting to note the introduction of the Higher Level Teaching Assistant role with its associated links to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). It will be interesting to see whether it may help to address some of the issues raised by the NFER survey.

6 Impact of teaching assistants

This chapter explores the areas in which respondents felt teaching assistants have had the most impact within schools. In particular, it describes the benefits and contributions which teaching assistants have made. The chapter also outlines difficulties faced by teaching assistants and the areas where the work of teaching assistants could be made more effective.

This section will consider the following questions.

- What is the role played by teaching assistants in improving schools and raising pupils' standards?

- Are teachers and teaching assistants able to plan and prepare work effectively together?

6.1 Areas of impact

All respondents were invited to provide information about the areas in which teaching assistants had impacted most. The question listed a number of possible responses together with space for additional comments. The responses from teachers are shown in Table 6.1.

Teachers reported that the most noticeable impact of teaching assistant support was the provision of additional support for pupil learning. This was highlighted across both phases and also supported by the responses from headteachers and teaching assistants. A further key impact was the support teaching assistants provided for teachers. Headteachers, in particular, felt this was important. Almost all primary headteachers and over three-quarters of headteachers in secondary schools stated this. This finding was similarly reflected by both teachers and teaching assistants.

Table 6.1 Impact of teaching assistants in the classroom

Areas of impact	Teacher responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Additional support for pupil learning	98	97
Support for the teacher	77	62
Presence of another adult in the classroom	65	65
Additional support for pupil behaviour	62	73
Reduction of teacher workload	53	18
Reduction of teacher stress	45	36
Other	10	8
No response	<1	2
	N = 359	N = 180

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teacher questionnaires

Teachers in secondary schools were slightly more positive about the impact of teaching assistants in providing additional support for pupil behaviour than those in primary schools, but this may be attributed to the greater prevalence of behavioural issues in the secondary phase, such as truancy or exclusions and the consequent need for additional support to deal with such issues. Headteacher and teaching assistant responses about the additional behaviour support that teaching assistants provided were equally favourable for both phases.

The presence of another adult in the classroom was also cited by teachers and headteachers, in both primary and secondary schools, as a key impact of teaching assistants. Overall, the views respondents held on the impacts of teaching assistants were very similar. In particular, the ability to target teaching assistant support at both pupils and teachers and the benefits this creates appears to be acknowledged and well received.

The reduction of teacher workloads and levels of reported teacher stress were considered by teachers to have had less impact than other areas, in both primary and secondary schools. This was more noticeable in secondary schools. Just over half (53 per cent) of primary teachers considered that teaching assistants had helped reduce their workloads compared with under a fifth (18 per cent) of secondary teachers.

There are a number of possible reasons behind this particular finding. Firstly, earlier findings in the report (Chapter 4) outlined the differences in tasks carried out by teaching assistants in each of the phases. If primary teaching assistants are more focused on administrative tasks this may influence teachers' perceptions of the impact of teaching assistant support on their workload. Secondly, teaching assistants in secondary schools are more likely to work with a variety of teachers and this may dilute the impact on any one particular teacher. Thirdly, the line management responsibilities may also influence the findings. If additional management responsibilities are accrued by teaching staff in their work with teaching assistants, this may add to teacher workloads.

6.2 Benefits of teaching assistant support

In addition to asking respondents to identify the impacts of teaching assistants, we also asked headteachers and teachers to provide examples of any benefits that they had personally experienced in their work with teaching assistants, or any contributions teaching assistants had made that had had a positive effect. Not surprisingly, the main benefits of teaching assistants shared some similarities with their main areas of impact. Almost half (49 per cent) of the teachers that responded to the survey felt that support for specific pupils was the main benefit of teaching assistant support which they had experienced. This was followed by the opportunity to share classroom responsibilities (33 per cent), sharing

professional opinions (32 per cent) and improving teachers' professional morale (19 per cent). Teachers were least likely to identify support with administrative tasks as a benefit (six per cent).

Responses from headteachers were similarly favourable towards the contributions teaching assistants had made in providing support for specific pupils. Forty-one per cent of headteachers cited this as contribution made by teaching assistants, which had had a particularly positive effect within their school. However, headteachers were more likely than teachers to report curriculum support as an area in which teaching assistants had made a positive contribution. This was cited by 26 per cent of headteachers compared with only six per cent of teachers. These differences may simply reflect the different experiences which are characteristic of people taking different roles within schools. The greater strategic and policy-driven overview of headteachers will offer a much wider, whole-school perspective on the contributions of teaching assistants, while the teachers are more likely to have first-hand knowledge at a classroom level.

Teaching assistants were also asked to provide examples of any positive contributions that they or a colleague had made. They were most likely to report curriculum support (31 per cent) and pastoral support (20 per cent) as contributions that were particularly positive. These findings were reflective of the views of teachers and headteachers, in that support for pupils was seen as a key contribution that teaching assistants make within schools. Overall, the pattern of findings reflects how each of the respondents acknowledged the contributions of teaching assistants that were particular to their circumstances.

6.3 Impacts on pupil performance

All three groups of respondents were invited to provide examples of the ways in which teaching assistants had had a positive impact on pupil performance. The format of the

question was open-ended which elicited a wide range of responses. In the main, respondents outlined how teaching assistants were able to deliver concentrated levels of support to specific individuals or small groups.

For example, a secondary school teacher commented:

> *teaching assistants can build students' confidence and allow them to get involved in the lesson whilst providing a safety net.*

A secondary teacher in another school said:

> *they [teaching assistants] can develop a slightly less formal relationship with pupils and sometimes this encourages pupils to be more cooperative.*

A general theme which emerged from the teachers' responses was the improved levels of support, which could be directed at individual pupils or small groups of pupils as a result of teaching assistants' contributions. For example, in one secondary school a teaching assistant had been working with level 3 pupils in years 7 and 8. The teacher reported that this had resulted in pupil attainment increasing to levels 4 and 5. In another school, a teacher explained how a teaching assistant had been working with a pupil with Asperger's Syndrome. The pupil was in a class of 32. In the teacher's opinion, the pupil would not have reached level 7 at key stage 3 without the support of a teaching assistant. The pupil was now in key stage 4 and was able to work independently.

An example provided by a primary school teacher demonstrated how the teaching assistant in her class had supported pupils in remaining on-task during whole-class teaching. The teaching assistant often supported small groups or individuals, enabling the teacher to focus on other groups. In another primary school, the teaching assistant had been working with a group of children to provide them with early literacy support. The teacher reported that the group had made rapid progress and achieved average to above average scores in their Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs).

6.4 Difficulties using teaching assistant support

All respondents were asked if there were any difficulties associated with the use of teaching assistants. Table 6.2 shows the responses from teaching assistants.

Table 6.2 Main difficulties associated with working with teaching assistants

Main difficulties	Teaching assistant responses %	
	Primary	Secondary
Lack of time for teaching assistants and teachers to prepare	73	89
Salaries too low	71	83
No proper pay structure/ opportunities for promotion	53	61
Different attitudes teachers may hold in working effectively with teaching assistants	34	71
Heavy workload	31	34
Lack of training and CPD opportunities	26	31
Emotional stress from working with pupils with difficulties	25	48
Lack of information about school/year group issues	24	38
Unclear status and extent of responsibilities	22	43
Teachers' reluctance to delegate	8	27
Other	8	13
No response	6	1
	N = 373	N = 201

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey – teaching assistant questionnaire

As may be expected, the biggest difficulty identified by teaching assistants was a lack of time to plan and prepare work with teachers. Just over three quarters of teaching assistants reported this to be an issue, with a slightly higher incidence at secondary than primary level. Responses from headteachers and teachers reflected a similar concern about the lack of time for teachers and teaching assistants to plan and prepare together. Over 80 per cent of headteachers and teachers felt

this was one of the main difficulties they encountered in working with or directing the work of teaching assistants in their school.

Teaching assistants reported that low salary levels was the second most common difficulty they encountered in their work. This was slightly more prevalent amongst teaching assistants in secondary schools. Headteachers and teachers were more likely to cite variability in the skills and experience of teaching assistants as one of the main areas of difficulty which they faced in working effectively with teaching assistant colleagues.

The fact that lack of time for teachers and teaching assistants to prepare together was a primary concern expressed by all three respondent groups, is an interesting finding. The Regulations made under S133 of the Education Act 2002 state:

> Supervision arrangements for all staff undertaking activities to support teaching and learning should include time for teachers and support staff to discuss planning and pupil progress within the contracted hours of the support staff.
>
> (England and Wales. Statutes, 2002)

However, in practice, it appeared that schools were finding it difficult to facilitate this time.

6.5 Making teaching assistants more effective

All respondents were invited to provide suggestions about how the work of teaching assistants could be made more effective. The question was open-ended and this elicited a variety of responses. The responses that were reported most often are detailed below, followed by a selection of those expressed by one or two respondents. This provides an indication of the diversity of suggestions given by respondents.

Teaching assistants felt that clarification of both their role and a career structure for teaching assistants (19 per cent) were the most important ways in which their role could be made more effective. In addition, improved communication between teachers and teaching assistants (14 per cent) and improved pay structures (13 per cent) were also identified. Headteachers generally agreed with teaching assistants that a clear career structure and improved levels of pay were fundamental in making the role more effective. The most frequent response from teachers concerned the need to improve communication between teachers and teaching assistants. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this was one of the main difficulties which teachers said they encountered in their work with teaching assistants. A teacher in one secondary school commented:

> It would be better if we had more time with them in the classroom. Sometimes they have to leave right in the middle of the literacy lesson and we have no support during the activities. Also sometimes they arrive half way through a lesson and so they miss the beginning. It makes their support work much harder.

Examples of some of the other responses are listed below. These included:

- a timetabled structure detailing daily tasks and responsibilities

- allocated space in schools for teaching assistants to work with pupils

- ensuring teaching assistants have job descriptions

- provide further training for teachers and teaching assistants to work effectively together

- implement standard framework/guidelines for the work of teaching assistants

- increase opportunities for teaching assistants to attend specialist training

- ensure a minimum entrance level qualification for teaching assistants

- more teaching assistant involvement in subject/departmental planning.

7 Summary and future issues

This section draws together the findings from each chapter to provide a summary of the main points. In addition it identifies potential future issues or areas for further research.

7.1 Summary

7.1.1 Employment of teaching assistants

In general, fewer teaching assistants were employed in primary schools than secondary schools, typically because of the tendency for secondary schools to be larger institutions and therefore employ more staff. Salary levels and hours worked also reflected the particular phase in which teaching assistants were employed. Teaching assistants were asked to provide details of their salary on the basis of the number of hours they worked and as secondary teaching assistants tended to be employed for more hours during term time, their salaries were generally higher.

Headteachers reported that local authority pay structures were currently in use in almost all LEAs. However teaching assistants were slightly less certain. In addition, many teaching assistants reported that their school either did not have, or they were uncertain whether their school had, written guidance on their roles and responsibilities. Where teaching assistants knew such policies existed, many said that they were applied consistently throughout their school. This was particularly noticeable at primary level, where access to information and the communication of school documentation may be easier to facilitate than in the secondary phase.

Responses from headteachers and teaching assistants indicated that teaching assistants were generally provided with job descriptions. Findings suggested that schools were more likely to have these in place rather than broader policy statements, which

outlined teaching assistants' roles and responsibilities.

Teaching assistants were more commonly employed on permanent contracts, either on an all-year or term-time only basis. A small number of teaching assistants revealed concerns about employment contracts which were not permanent and the lack of security they evoked for some members of staff.

Line management responsibility predominantly lay with the headteacher in primary schools and the SENCO in secondary schools. This seemed to reflect the deployment of teaching assistants, in that secondary teaching assistants were more likely to work with pupils with special needs and therefore would fall under the line management of the SENCO.

7.1.2 Deployment of teaching assistants

The level of support provided by teaching assistants varied between primary and secondary schools. Primary teachers tended to have some teaching assistant support every day. Teachers in secondary schools were less likely to receive this level of daily support and it tended to be more fragmentary. Teachers had mixed views as to whether their allocation of teaching assistant support was sufficient. Teachers in primary schools were slightly more satisfied with their allocation of support than those in secondary schools.

Generally, teaching assistants were not required to cover whole lessons in the absence of a qualified teacher. It appeared that they were more likely to provide short periods of whole-class supervision whilst the teacher dealt with an incident elsewhere. The research acknowledged that different respondents would interpret this question based on their own perspectives and interpretation of it.

Teaching assistants tended to work with individual specified pupils. In primary schools they were more likely to support the same class and teacher than secondary teaching assistants who were more likely to be deployed with a variety of year groups and various teachers. Secondary teaching assistants most commonly worked with five different year groups compared with teaching assistants in primary schools who were more frequently allocated to one or two year groups.

Teaching assistants provided support in a variety of areas. Typically this included curriculum support, behavioural and emotional support and special needs support. Tasks within each of these areas usually involved elements of supporting teaching, pupil monitoring and assessment, preparation and display work, pupil support and administrative tasks. Skills which were valued in carrying these tasks out effectively included flexibility, good organisation skills, enthusiasm, confidence and an understanding of child development.

Headteachers had mixed reactions about the effects of the National Agreement on teacher workloads. Positive responses included: improved communication between teachers and teaching assistants and the allocation of more time to teachers. Common concerns included: deploying teaching assistants to provide more administrative support, rather than supporting pupils and extra funding pressures on school budgets.

7.1.3 Professional and career development

Many schools had whole-school policies for the professional development of teaching assistants. However, schools were less likely to have a career structure for teaching assistants which outlined criteria for promotion and/or increases in their salary. In some cases, teaching assistants were unsure of whether such policies were in place or not. On the whole, there appeared to be an acknowledgement of the professional

development requirements of teaching assistants and less formal recognition of the experience they had and their development of new skills.

Teaching assistants highlighted a range of qualifications and involvement in training courses. The majority of respondents reported that they were invited to participate in various professional development activities such as, whole-school INSET and courses specifically tailored for teaching assistants. However, invitations to participate in training were irregular and varied between teaching assistants.

First aid courses were the most frequently attended areas of training, followed by courses which focused on developing expertise in working with pupils with special needs and those that provided the opportunity for teaching assistants to gain expertise in particular subject areas. Invitations and inclusion in these types of courses were well supported by teaching assistants and by teachers who particularly valued teaching assistant attendance at training which developed their expertise in working with pupils with special needs.

The findings suggested that although line management responsibilities were held mainly by headteachers in primary schools and SENCOs in secondary schools, responsibility for organising or leading professional development activities for teaching assistants was often held by a teacher.

Barriers which prevented teaching assistants accessing CPD activities varied between respondents. Teaching assistants were more likely to highlight school-based issues such as: they were not invited to attend CPD activities or the school could not afford to fund their attendance. Headteachers more often spoke about practical barriers such as: teaching assistants had family commitments which prevented their participation or that teaching assistants found the times at which courses were organised made them inaccessible.

The majority of teaching assistants seemed happy to remain in their current post, in the short-term at least, but were less sure about their long-term career development. Very few reported that they could see themselves as qualified teachers either within one year or five years.

7.1.4 Impact of teaching assistants

Without doubt, the area in which teaching assistants were felt to have the most impact was the additional support they provided for pupil learning. This was identified across both phases and by all three respondent groups. The support they provided for the teacher was also acknowledged. Impacts on the reduction of teacher workloads were not as commonly reported. In secondary schools, few teachers felt that teaching assistants had helped reduce their workload.

Teaching assistants were identified as having many positive effects on pupil performance. In particular, the fact that they were able to deliver concentrated levels of support to specific individuals or small groups of pupils was highlighted.

The main difficulty associated with working with teaching assistants was the lack of time teachers and teaching assistants had to prepare together. This was identified by teaching assistants, headteachers and teachers. Teaching assistants also reported that salaries were too low.

Respondents suggested a number of measures which could be introduced in order to make the work of teaching assistants more effective. Teaching assistants tended to agree that improved clarification both of their role and a career structure for teaching assistants would encourage this. Headteachers tended to agree with this, but teachers, on the other hand, felt that there was a need to improve communication between themselves and teaching assistants.

7.2 Future issues

Several of the issues raised in the findings from the NFER survey are stated in the National Agreement, such as:

- improved career development opportunities for teaching assistants

- opportunities to take on extended roles in support of teaching and learning

- recognition for the contribution they make to raising pupil standards.

The following section considers any additional issues for the future, raised by the current research.

7.2.1 Communication

Teachers and teaching assistants highlighted the lack of time they had to prepare with each other.

- How can opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to share information be facilitated?

- What opportunities are there for them to attend joint training activities?

- Would teachers and teaching assistants benefit from better access to information about each others roles and responsibilities?

7.2.2 Accessible information exchange

Many teaching assistants were unsure about certain aspects of their employment such as whether their pay structures were set at a local authority level and although many had job descriptions, a large number of schools were without broader policy statements on the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants.

- What opportunities are there for new teaching assistants to familiarise themselves with their school and its structure?

- Do teaching assistants have the same access to information as other school staff?

- What opportunities are there for teaching assistants to disseminate information to colleagues in their school?

7.2.3 Line management

Although it was clear who tended to line manage teaching assistants in schools, the arrangements for organising their professional development were not as clear.

- Are day-to-day line management activities and responsibility for the professional development of teaching assistants carried out by different members of staff?

- What level of access do teaching assistants have to their line managers?

- What training opportunities are available for those who line manage teaching assistants?

7.2.4 Training

Although teaching assistants attended a variety of training activities, invitations to participate were not consistent.

- To what extent are teaching assistants aware of training opportunities available to them?

- Do they have access to advice about what courses to attend?

- Can teaching assistants participate in courses which allow them to explore an area of interest or increase specialist knowledge?

- Should training opportunities for teaching assistants take into account or reflect whether they are employed in the primary or secondary phases?

- To what extent are barriers which may discourage teaching assistants from attending courses identified and overcome?

Appendix 1   Analysis of policy documents on roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants

School type	Document title	Information covered
Primary	Classroom support policy	• roles during lesson time • booster groups • planning • targets • whole-class supervision • extra-curricular activities

Primary	A job description for a learning support assistant	• line management
		• purpose of job
		• roles and responsibilities
		  – supporting the pupil
		  – supporting the teacher
		  – supporting the school
		  – supporting the ESA

Primary	Borough council education department job description	• line management • principle duties and responsibilities
Primary	Staff development	• training • staff development reviews
Primary	The duties of learning support assistants by comparative scale competency	• successfully fostering the participation of pupils in the social and academic practices of the school • enabling pupils to become more independent learners • helping to raise standards of achievement for all pupils • training • line management
Primary	LEA policy for adults supporting pupils with SEN	• definition of job title and role • supporting the child • supporting the teacher • supporting the pupils • supporting the school • supporting the classroom assistant (training) • commonly asked questions
Primary	Support staff policy	• support for the children • support for the teacher • support for the school • personal qualities • appraisal, induction and training
Secondary	Job description	• line management • support for teaching staff • support for pupils • support for SENCO

Appendix 2 Additional school-level responsibilities of teaching assistants

Responsibility	% of teaching assistants
1–1 support for statemented pupil/autism	11.0
Small group work for ALS, e.g. Springboard	10.5
General work with a particular class/year	6.6
First aid	5.9
Administration	3.1
Administer PAT/other SEN programmes	2.8
Leading team of teaching assistants	2.6
Reading groups/reading recovery	2.1
Playground/lunchtime supervision	2.1
IT support for pupils/ICT	1.6
Using/making signs	1.6
Staff governor	1.6
Speech + language therapy	1.4
Run extra-curricular activities	1.4
Running the school library	1.4
Plan with SENCO for SEN pupils	1.2
Mentoring	1.2
Own pupils to assess	1.0
Other	15.9
No response	55.9

N = 574

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.
Source: NFER teaching assistant survey

References

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ENGLAND AND WALES. STATUTES (2002). *Education Act 2002. Chapter 32.* London: The Stationery Office.

LEE, B. (2002). *Teaching Assistants in Schools: the Current State of Play* (LGA Research Report 34). Slough: NFER.

NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES (2003). *School Support Staff: the Way Forward.* London: Employer's Organisation for Local Government.

WORKFORCE AGREEMENT MONITORING GROUP (2003). *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: a National Agreement. Time for Standards* [online]. Available: http://www.askatl.org.uk/pdfs/150103a.pdf [15 January, 2004].

Internet resources

http://www.useyourheadteach.gov.uk
Teacher Training Agency

http://www.remodelling.org
National Remodelling Team

The LGA Educational Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to LEAs. All the reports are published and disseminated by NFER, with separate executive summaries.

The summaries are available free of charge both on paper and on the NFER website – www.nfer.ac.uk

A selection of recent publications arising from the LGA Educational Research Programme

New Technologies Supporting Teaching and Learning (LGA Research Report 49)
Mark Cunningham, Sue Harris, Kirstin Kerr and Rhona McEune

This study focused on specific ICT projects in schools and found that teachers' use of new technologies has led to changes in their educational approaches, having a significant impact upon students, both in the ways they are required to work using ICT and in developing extra-curricular skills. In discussions, students stated that they enjoyed using new technologies and were able to recognise the 'real life relevance' of using them. The case-study schools and their partner organisations featured in this research offered a wealth of ideas for future ICT development in schools, ideas which could enhance the quality of teaching and facilitate learning. In addition, the effect on the wider community was also important to this study, as schools have endeavoured to develop home, community and industry links. One of the important messages that emerged was the desire of schools to develop links with industry and others in the community, and to afford more paid time for teachers to explore the potential of new technologies.

Published in 2003   ISBN 1 903880 48 3   Price: £8.50

School Phobia and School Refusal: Research into Causes and Remedies (LGA Research Report 46)
Tamsin Archer, Caroline Filmer-Sankey and Felicity Fletcher-Campbell

This study considered the causes of school phobia and school refusal and what Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and schools can do to support affected pupils. It focused specifically on identification and assessment, causes of school refusal and phobia, provision for pupils who appear to be school refusers and school phobics, and training and monitoring structures.

Published in 2003   ISBN 1 903880 59 9   Price: £8.00

School Attendance and the Prosecution of Parents: Perspectives from Education Welfare Service Management (LGA Research Report 43)
Sally Kendall, Richard White and Kay Kinder

This research is the first stage of a three phase study and provides an overview of the prosecution process within LEAs from interviews with 122 Principal Education Welfare Officers (PEWOs) or equivalent, and data on prosecutions provided by nearly 100 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) between September 2001 and July 2002. It gives an in-depth study examining the effects and effectiveness of prosecuting parents as a strategy to combat non-school attendance.

Published in 2003   ISBN 1 903880 51 3   Price: £9.00

Using Research for School Improvement: The LEA's Role (LGA Research Report 42)
Rebekah Wilson, Jane Hemsley-Brown, Claire Easton and Caroline Sharp

Schools and teachers who use research gain new challenges, insights and levels of understanding – and find it enhances the quality of teaching and learning. This report provides LEAs with information on good practice in the use of research to support school improvement. Examples of projects supported and/or initiated by LEAs are identified and show that much is being done to promote and facilitate research use.

Published in 2003   ISBN 1 903880 49 1   Price: £8.50

Saving a Place for the Arts? A Survey of the Arts in Primary Schools in England (LGA Research Report 41)
Dick Downing, Fiona Johnson and Satpal Kaur

The report reveals a degree of commitment and determination to secure the place of the arts in the face of what are perceived to be considerable threats. It further identifies perceptions of a significant mismatch between the views of school staff and the views of policy makers concerning the value of the arts in primary schools. While recent national changes in the approach to the arts have brought about some developments, schools themselves are seeking a climate change.

Published in 2003   ISBN 1 903880 45 9   Price: £10.00

For further information on any of the above projects or the publications, please contact:

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