



*Local Government Association*

# teaching assistants in schools: the current state of play

by Barbara Lee,  
National Foundation for Educational Research

LGA educational research programme



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# teaching assistants in schools: the current state of play

**Barbara Lee**

  
*Local Government Association*

  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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## OVERVIEW AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A number of factors have been put forward as influential in increasing the numbers of teaching assistants in schools and the variety of their roles. Three main factors have been identified:

- ◆ the inclusion of children with a very wide range of needs in mainstream schools, leading to the need for more adults to provide support
- ◆ teacher recruitment and retention difficulties leading to an insufficiency of qualified teachers to fulfil the Government's programmes
- ◆ a plethora of Government, LEA and school initiatives leading to teachers feeling overburdened with paperwork and bureaucracy.

So have the increased employment and more varied deployment of teaching assistants met these needs?

The research and other literature reviewed here has demonstrated that teaching assistants are playing increasingly significant roles in schools in supporting teachers, pupils and the school more generally. The pattern of a teacher accompanied by one or more teaching assistants working with individuals, groups and classes of pupils has become commonplace, especially in primary schools, partly due to the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. However, this is not necessarily leading to any reduction in teacher workload, thereby allowing them to concentrate more on planning and preparation or other teaching-related tasks. Rather, it has given teachers additional responsibilities as they need to plan the work of other adults and manage those adults, in addition to managing the class.

### Summary of main findings and suggestions for further research

#### Job titles

- ◆ The titles of teaching assistants still vary, despite the Government's recommendation that all support staff working with teachers should be designated as 'teaching assistants'. Some of the variation is due to the type of qualification and/or experience held by the teaching assistants, and some is due to differentiation of the tasks carried out.

#### Further research

Are the distinctions between job titles and/or tasks carried out of any benefit to teachers, pupils or teaching assistants themselves?



## Roles

- ◆ The roles of teaching assistants are varied but can be grouped into four main types of support: for the teacher, for the pupil, for the curriculum, for the school.
- ◆ Teaching assistants work with individuals and/or small groups of pupils both within and outside the classroom and may on occasions take responsibility for specific aspects of a lesson with the whole class.
- ◆ Teaching assistants also, in some schools, contribute to assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' work under the supervision of, or in collaboration with, teachers.
- ◆ Teaching assistants provide cover for absent teachers on occasions, but this does not appear to be widespread.
- ◆ Teaching assistants sometimes carry out some administrative tasks for teachers, and administrative staff may take on aspects of lesson preparation.

### Further research

Which of the many roles carried out by teaching assistants seem to provide the most benefit for pupils, in terms of personal development and academic attainment?

## Deployment

- ◆ Teaching assistants are increasingly working with small groups of pupils rather than being attached to individuals with identified learning or behavioural difficulties, thereby providing support to a greater number of pupils and more flexible support to the teacher.
- ◆ In secondary schools, teaching assistants are more likely to be attached to subject or departmental areas, thereby enabling them to develop their own knowledge, skills and confidence within those areas.
- ◆ The subject attachments also lead to teaching assistants becoming more involved in departmental and whole-school activities and greater collaboration with teachers.
- ◆ Most teachers and teaching assistants feel that there are still insufficient timetabled opportunities for them to carry out joint planning, preparation and review of lessons.

### Further research

What are the actual tasks that teaching assistants are carrying out, in detail, and how do these benefit pupils? What pedagogical skills do teaching assistants have or develop that benefit pupils?

### Status

- ◆ As teaching assistants' roles have changed so has their status, and in many schools they are regarded as valuable members of staff.
- ◆ However, many teaching assistants still feel that teachers do not always appreciate their contribution, and see them as creating extra work rather than reducing teacher workload. In addition, their previous skills and experience may not be acknowledged or even known about by teachers, often due to the lack of time available for pre- and post-lesson discussions.
- ◆ Both teaching assistants and teachers accept that the teacher has overall responsibility for the class and teaching assistants are there to provide support. However, when the teacher and teaching assistants are able to work in a collaborative, mutually supportive way, teaching and learning appear to be more effective.
- ◆ Factors underpinning good practice in effective working include:
  - clarity of the role of teaching assistants
  - opportunities for pre- and post-lesson discussions between teachers and teaching assistants
  - effective communication between teachers and teaching assistants and between the wider school community and teaching assistants
  - ongoing professional development and support for teaching assistants.

### Conditions of employment

- ◆ Recruitment and selection of teaching assistants have often been carried out in a fairly informal way but schools are gradually identifying criteria for selecting appropriate staff and producing job descriptions which define more closely the responsibilities and tasks involved in the job. It has been found helpful if teaching assistants themselves can participate in the drawing up of job descriptions.
- ◆ The salaries of teaching assistants are consistently found to be too low, in the eyes of both teachers and teaching assistants, and many teaching assistants are employed on temporary or term time-only contracts, thereby giving poor wages and little or no job security.
- ◆ Many teaching assistants are also only paid for the time they have pupil contact and may attend meetings or professional development sessions in their own time, unpaid.

## Training and development

- ◆ Training and development opportunities for teaching assistants are now much more available and include courses relating to:
  - induction needs
  - personal and professional development
  - development of knowledge and expertise in particular subject areas
  - development of knowledge of particular difficulties experienced by pupils, and skills to work with pupils with those difficulties
  - information on and understanding of relevant school, LEA and national policies.
- ◆ There is also a need for teachers to receive some training and development in the most effective ways of working with teaching assistants, but such support is not widely available.
- ◆ Joint training and development where teachers and teaching assistants learn and subsequently act together have been found to be very effective in fostering team work and a consistent approach in the classroom.
- ◆ Many teaching assistants have identified the difficulties of participating in training and development, especially if these take place off-site or outside school hours. Most of the difficulties relate to:
  - inappropriate courses
  - practical considerations related to time, costs, travel and family commitments
  - lack of payment for time spent.

### Further research

What is the longer-term and cumulative impact of training and development on teaching assistants, teachers and pupil performance?

## Accreditation and career structure

- ◆ Training courses for teaching assistants have been accredited by a range of bodies and under a range of titles. City and Guilds Certificates in Learning Support and Specialist Teacher Assistant courses are popular.
- ◆ The Local Government National Training Organisation has developed a set of national occupational standards for teaching assistants, and award bodies are developing National Vocational Qualifications at levels 2 and 3 based on these standards.

- ◆ Despite their high take-up of training and development, teaching assistants still have limited opportunities to make formal progress in their careers as teaching assistants. Some schools and LEAs are establishing job titles and pay structures which recognise experience and qualifications but many are not, and teaching assistants frequently stay at the same level with no prospects for development.
- ◆ Recognised routes for teaching assistants to work towards Qualified Teacher Status are now in place, though their availability varies. Some individuals working as teaching assistants have expressed the wish to train as teachers, and some schools, LEAs and higher education institutions have set up partnerships to support this.
- ◆ The benefits of training for teaching assistants' confidence, knowledge and skills have been reported but mostly in connection with specific courses.

**Further research**

Are the increasing opportunities for acquiring qualifications sufficient to encourage teaching assistants to take up courses, given the constraints?

How feasible is it for teaching assistants to acquire QTS, especially if they are taking a workplace-based route?

**Impact**

- ◆ The impact on teaching and learning of teaching assistants supporting teachers and pupils has been widely reported as positive, particularly with regard to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.
- ◆ The impact on workload has been perceived in different ways: teaching assistants can and do take on tasks formerly carried out by teachers but, on the other hand, teachers have to take responsibility for teaching assistants and to ensure that their planning and preparation make the most effective use of the teaching assistants, and this could increase workload.

**Further research**

Which tasks do teachers feel comfortable about delegating to teaching assistants (and/or other support staff) and what impact does this have on pupil attainment and teacher workload?

## Factors for effective working by teaching assistants

Throughout the materials reviewed, a number of common threads appear in relation to the factors which support the most effective working by teaching assistants, as listed below.

- ◆ clarity of role
- ◆ accurate and updated job description
- ◆ thorough induction and support structures
- ◆ clear line management
- ◆ consideration of most appropriate deployment of teaching assistants
- ◆ time for teaching assistants and teaching staff to collaborate
- ◆ guidance and support for teaching assistants on strategies to use with pupils
- ◆ support and, where required, training for teaching staff on the most effective ways of managing and working with teaching assistants
- ◆ communication strategies which ensure that teaching assistants are fully informed both on aspects of school life directly relevant to their work and more broadly
- ◆ paid time for teaching assistants to participate in meetings and whole-school activities
- ◆ paid time for teaching assistants to participate in relevant training and development opportunities
- ◆ appropriate accreditation and career structures for teaching assistants
- ◆ salary levels and structures which recognise teaching assistants' skills and expertise and reward them appropriately for their contribution.

The longer-term impact of the work of teaching assistants has yet to be established but the evidence so far is positive. What is also clear is that when teachers and teaching assistants collaborate effectively and work as a team, the effects are beneficial for teachers, pupils and teaching assistants.

More research is now needed to understand more precisely how the tasks carried out by teaching assistants benefit teachers and pupils, and the ways in which the support they provide for teaching and learning can be most effective. In addition, if it can be shown that the work of teaching assistants can help to alleviate teachers' workload, thereby releasing them to concentrate on teaching and learning-related activities, this will surely have a positive impact on raising standards of achievement for all.

The subsequent sections of this paper provide a summary of relevant research and the evidence for the findings reported above.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Aim of the paper

The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of existing research and commentary on the roles of teaching assistants in schools, the issues arising from the ways they are employed and deployed, and to identify areas in which further research could be carried out.

## Research design

In order to provide the overview, a review was carried out of a number of reports, articles and books which make reference to teaching assistants and their roles. The majority of documents considered were based on research or policy statements, but some other materials have been included because of their relevance to the topic. The materials were published in the last ten to 12 years, and are based on research carried out during that period. Earlier work, though still relevant in some respects, has not been reported separately both because most of the findings have been incorporated into the more recent work and because the context has changed so significantly in recent years.

A small number of studies have been published since the increases in the number of teaching assistants over the last few years, and these, therefore, provide up-to-date evidence of views and information, firmly based in the current situation.

## Contents of the paper

The paper begins with an overview of the findings and suggestions for further research. Subsequent sections report on research findings, information, guidance, and commentary, relating to the following issues:

- ◆ background
- ◆ titles of teaching assistants
- ◆ roles of teaching assistants
- ◆ deployment and management of teaching assistants
- ◆ perceptions of status and role
- ◆ conditions of employment
- ◆ training and development
- ◆ impact on teaching and learning
- ◆ impact on workload.

## 2. BACKGROUND

For many years, adults other than teachers could be found in mainstream schools in a relatively limited range of roles: as nursery nurses, welfare assistants, office staff, technicians, and caretaking staff. In special schools, however, staff fulfilled a much broader range of roles, in providing support to pupils and teachers.

In the last ten to 15 years, the picture in mainstream schools has changed. The main factor behind the change is the increasing inclusion in mainstream schools of pupils with special educational needs. For some time, such pupils were educated in special schools or in separate units, but through the 1970s and 1980s, there was a gradual move to increase available places in mainstream schools. This was partly as a result of research which suggested that children with special educational needs and other children would benefit from being educated all together (see, for example, Hegarty *et al.*, 1981).

The allocation of statements to pupils with special educational needs, which defined the support they would need, led to new roles for both teachers and other adults, in mainstream schools. The additional support required by the pupils to be able to cope in the mainstream classroom was provided either by qualified teachers with experience in working with pupils with learning difficulties or, increasingly, by classroom assistants, who developed appropriate expertise on the job.

The funding for the assistants was often linked to the statements of individual pupils, and they would work with those designated pupils for the amount of time stipulated on the statements. Many assistants were employed by the LEA through the funding streams managed by the LEA and, because their funding was linked to individual pupils, assistants' contracts were often tied to those pupils and were therefore temporary and short-term.

As pupils with a wider range of support needs were increasingly included in mainstream schools, so the roles of assistants became more varied. Assistants might be involved with pupils other than those with statements, or working on tasks which provided support for the teacher rather than direct support for pupils.

In 1994, The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs was published (DFE, 1994), and it was established that pupils who had learning difficulties which were identifiable but not requiring the level of support accompanying a statement should have their needs formally recognised and that appropriate support should be provided. This had a significant effect on the numbers of assistants employed to work in schools and the range of tasks carried out, and raised a number of issues about their management and development which schools had to take on board.



As well as pupils with learning difficulties, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties who might once have been educated in special schools were also gradually included in mainstream schools throughout the 1990s. Recent Government policies have promoted both social and emotional inclusion, and a wide number of schemes and initiatives have been set up to find the most effective ways of supporting children with challenging behaviour to cope in mainstream schools. At the same time, schools have been penalised for excluding too many pupils or for poor attendance figures, and further schemes have been developed to support pupils who are unable or unwilling to attend school.

Assistants have been involved in many of these schemes and initiatives, and have provided support to pupils and teachers according to the needs of the schools.

A further issue which has increased the numbers of assistants in schools and raised questions about the development of their role has been that of the recruitment and retention of teachers. Recent Governments have introduced a host of new initiatives designed to raise standards of achievement which have to be implemented by teachers, but recruitment to the profession and retention of experienced teachers have both been falling. Some of the reasons for this have been attributed to heavy workload and an increase in bureaucracy. In a bid to increase the number of adults in schools, therefore, the Government has put forward funding to increase the number of assistants and a number of initiatives and guidance to improve their skills and the range of roles they can fulfil (DfEE, 1997; England. Parliament. HoC, 2001).

One approach to meeting the complaints of teachers with regard to an overload of work, and in particular, of too much paperwork and bureaucracy, has been for the Government to encourage an increase in the number of administrative support staff in schools. Similarly, the widespread use of ICT in schools has created the need for more technical support. Both these developments have had an impact on the numbers of staff other than teachers employed in schools and the variety of roles played.

### 3. TITLES OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

It is clear that a plethora of job titles has been used to describe people who assist in classrooms (Balshaw, 1998; Swann and Loxley, 1998; Watkinson, 1998; Lee and Mawson, 1998; Hancock *et al.*, 2001), and titles have often changed to meet changing roles. Those which appear to be most commonly used are:

- Classroom Assistant
- Learning Support Assistant
- Special Support Assistant
- Special Needs Assistant
- Specialist Teacher Assistant.

Other titles in use include: general assistants, nursery nurses, bilingual support staff, administrative support staff.

A study carried out on behalf of the National Union of Teachers in 1998 proposed a way of clarifying job titles. In their report, the authors pointed out that terms such as 'non teaching staff or non teaching assistants' were negative and 'though widely used, [were] regarded by many teachers and associate staff as offensive and likely to give a poor and inaccurate picture of their role' (p.1). Instead, the report uses the following terminology:

- *associate staff as a generic term for all those staff employed in school who are not qualified teachers*
- *classroom assistants for those who work alongside teachers in the (mainly primary) classroom*
- *learning support assistants (LSAs) for those whose role is specifically related to children with special educational needs*
- *technician, librarian, clerical officer etc where such generally used and unambiguous terms are available.*

(NUT, 1998)

Although the term 'associate staff' was clearly a useful one, it did not appear to have gained wide currency, whilst the other terms are widely used (or have been until recently).

The latest attempt to clarify the terminology and provide consistency has been provided by the DfES (then DfEE). Their guide to headteachers and teachers (DfEE, 2000) states that:

*The term 'teaching assistant' (TA) is the Government's preferred generic term of reference for all those in paid employment in support of teachers in primary, special and secondary schools.*

*That includes those with a general role and others with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group. The term captures the essential 'active ingredient' of their work; in particular, it acknowledges the contribution which well-trained and well-managed assistants can make to the teaching and learning process and to pupil achievement. (p. 4)*

For the purposes of this paper, therefore, '**teaching assistant**' will be used except where the discussion relates specifically to terminology, as in this section, or where alternative terms are used by other writers and in direct quotations.

## 4. ROLES OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

One of the interesting things to come out of this review is that, despite attempts to clarify roles, there are both distinctions between different teaching assistants and overlaps between different roles. Some studies found that staff might have both different titles and different conditions of service (for example, nursery nurses and teaching assistants) but be carrying out very similar work (Farrell *et al.*, 1999). For example, 'learning support assistants' usually target pupils with special educational needs and 'behaviour support assistants' usually target pupils with identified emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, as individuals, they may be providing support to a wider range of pupils, including high-achieving pupils and/or those without identified difficulties.

### What are the roles?

A number of researchers (Lorenz, 1998; Lee and Mawson, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; Labour Research Department, 2002) have attempted to identify the different roles carried out by teaching assistants. The roles can be categorised in different ways but they are neatly summarised by DfES in their 'good practice guide', as follows:

- *support for the pupil*
- *support for the teacher*
- *support for the curriculum*
- *support for the school.*

(DfEE, 2000, p. 8)

Support for the pupil is provided in different ways, as teaching assistants may work with:

- individual pupils in class
- individual pupils outside the classroom
- small groups of pupils in class
- small groups of pupils outside the classroom
- the whole class.

Many teaching assistants might find themselves working in any or all of these ways throughout a single day or in the course of a week.

The introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies has also formalised the role of the teaching assistants in many primary schools, and OFSTED (2001) reports that teaching assistants may work jointly with teachers in the introductory part of the sessions, followed by work with small groups of pupils, often those with identified learning

difficulties, or needing support with behaviour management, to help them with specific tasks.

Support for the teacher may be provided by teaching assistants in terms of the direct support for children listed above. However, they also provide more indirect support by producing materials, developing differentiated materials for pupils working at different levels, managing resources, record keeping and reporting, and other tasks inside and outside the classroom (for more detail see Lorenz, 1998; Hancock *et al.*, 2001).

Although much of the research and commentary on the roles of teaching assistants has been carried out in the context of supporting children with special educational needs and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties, nevertheless many of the findings and recommendations in terms of roles, and other issues (discussed in later chapters of this paper), are relevant to all those assisting in the classroom in the kinds of roles listed above. Indeed, Farrell *et al.* (1999) suggest that 'there is inevitably a large overlap between the work of general classroom assistants and LSAs'.

## To what extent are the different roles undertaken?

As described above, many individual teaching assistants may provide support for pupils across the range of approaches identified. Lee and Mawson (1998) provided evidence of this, as Table 4.1 shows.

**Table 4.1** Types of support provided by teaching assistants

Types of support	Percentage (%) providing support
Providing support to the teachers by teaching or working with small group within a class	77
Supporting a number of pupils in lessons	49
Supporting an individual pupil in some or most lessons	43
Teaching or counselling outside the classroom	38
Providing support to a whole class	33
Providing support to the teacher by preparing or contributing to the production of additional materials	31
Providing support to the teacher through providing information on the content of IEPs and the needs of individual pupils	22
No response	>1

*Based on survey of 767 classroom assistants in primary schools. Percentages do not sum to 100 as respondents could provide more than one type of support.*

More recently, the role of teaching assistants in providing a great deal of support in the Literacy and Numeracy Hours has been reported by Hancock *et al.* (2001) and confirmed by OFSTED (2001 and 2002). The study by

Hancock *et al.* found ‘high assistant involvement with individuals [pupils] but also high involvement with groups of all sizes – up to ten children and sometimes half the class’ (p.12). They also found that 91 per cent of assistants said they sometimes supported children through withdrawal. Other figures cited in that report show that:

- *84 per cent of teachers said assistants contributed to the assessment of children’s work*
- *76 per cent of teachers said that assistants were involved in recording children’s progress*
- *one in five assistants reported that they sometimes worked with the whole class on their own – although this was often done within the supportive framework of an established classroom routine.*

*(Hancock et al., 2001)*

Most recently, a survey carried out by St J. Neill (2002) for the National Union of Teachers (NUT) asked members of the union to provide information and views on teaching assistants. The study found that teaching assistants were ‘most frequently deployed to support an individual statemented child (47.3 per cent) or several (26.4 per cent), both commoner at secondary than primary level’ (p. 8). They found differences between primary and secondary schools whereby, in the former, teaching assistants were

*mainly deployed in the core subjects (literacy, numeracy, ICT and to a lesser extent science) and to support groups or individuals in class, and less commonly groups or individuals withdrawn from the class ... deployment to assist the class as a whole was less common. (p. 8)*

The survey also found that in secondary schools, ‘specialist [subject] teaching was accompanied by the deployment of specialist Teaching Assistants’.

## Cover for teachers

It has been suggested that teaching assistants could provide a useful role in sometimes taking the teachers’ place, although the appropriateness of this has been disputed. As indicated in Section 6, teaching assistants are quite clear that their role is to support rather than replace teachers, but nevertheless there is some evidence to show that, on occasions, they have covered for absent teachers. The NUT study (St J. Neill, 2002) indicated that a small proportion of teachers allowed teaching assistants to work on their own, usually for an hour or less, ‘most commonly when the teacher was called away from the class, either on a planned or unplanned basis’ (p.17). The UNISON study (Labour Research Department, 2002) found that 15 per cent of schools reported teaching assistants taking classes as cover for absent teachers ‘but only 2 per cent (16 schools) said that teaching assistants are required to provide cover on a regular basis’ (p. 12).

## Other support staff in schools

It is relevant to note at this point that other support staff in schools may be making a contribution to supporting teachers and pupils in ways which would fall within the categories listed above. A study for the DfES by Greene *et al.* (2002) found that administrative support staff carried out tasks on behalf of teachers in relation to lesson preparation and the production of materials.

The focus of that study was on the tasks that could be carried out by administrative staff on behalf of teachers to reduce their workload, and it deliberately avoided investigating the role of teaching assistants. However, at least one teacher in a case study school described how she would ask her classroom assistant (rather than the administrative staff), to carry out photocopying tasks as she felt more comfortable with this. If this feeling is widespread, it could lead to teaching assistants taking on dual roles of both support for teaching and learning as well as administrative support.

This section has presented findings on the role of teaching assistants in terms of the kinds of tasks carried out, without further commentary. The following two sections discuss some of the issues that can arise in relation to the deployment of teaching assistants and the situation where more than one adult is working in a classroom.

## 5. DEPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

As described in Section 4, teaching assistants take on a range of roles both within and outside the classroom and with individuals and groups of pupils, raising the question of which might be the most effective approaches. A common theme which emerges from the material reviewed is that it is generally more appropriate for teaching assistants to be deployed to work with designated teachers or classes, rather than to be attached to a single pupil or a number of single pupils. The literature (Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; OFSTED, 2002) suggests a number of advantages to this approach:

- a wider range of pupils can benefit from additional support
- individual pupils do not feel labelled as different
- the teacher can draw on the additional support more flexibly, according to the demands of each class or lesson
- the teaching assistant can use and develop a wider range of skills.

However, a small number of disadvantages have also been pointed out, namely that teaching assistants may experience a 'fragmented' approach to deployment and find it more difficult both to have an overview of pupils' progress and to find opportunities to plan and communicate with teachers (Hancock *et al.*, 2001).

As indicated in Section 4, since the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary schools, many teaching assistants have found their roles, for at least some of the time, becoming both more closely defined and more challenging. This has created a demand for further training and support and raised other issues. For example, if teaching assistants are required to work with small groups, perhaps outside the classroom, whilst the teacher works with other groups, there may be concerns by the teacher about:

- the confidence and competence of teaching assistants to operate independently
- maintaining an overview of teaching assistants' work
- maintaining an overview of pupils' work.

In secondary schools, with the move away from attaching teaching assistants to individual pupils, has come a move towards linking teaching assistants, where possible, to subject areas (Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996; Lorenz, 1998; Jerwood, 1999). This enables the teaching assistants to develop an understanding of the subject area which increases their own confidence



when working with pupils. It also facilitates their work in preparing materials and helps them to develop relationships with a particular group of teachers. This latter factor is important, as other research has shown that when teaching assistants have to work with a great many different teachers, especially if there is no joint planning and preparation, they may find it difficult to adjust to the style of each teacher and to work effectively (Lorenz, 1998; Jerwood, 1999; O'Brien and Garner, 2001).

Jerwood (1999) found not only that teaching assistants attached to faculties in his school benefited in the ways described above but that

*teachers also started to discuss pupil progress with their assistants and to plan strategies to enable pupils with difficulties to access and to learn in their area .... Thus once teachers were aware that assistants were competent in their area the degree of collaboration increased. (p.128)*

The attachment to subject areas also often led to teaching assistants taking a more active part in subject-related staff meetings, to which they had previously not been invited or at which they had not felt welcome. This, in turn, increased their participation in the planning and preparation for lessons and the exchange of ideas and information (Jerwood, 1999).

On the other hand, virtually all the studies reviewed showed that there was still insufficient contact between teachers and teaching assistants, either pre- or post-lessons and for longer term-planning and preparation.

## 6. PERCEPTIONS OF STATUS AND ROLE

In the previous section, the roles of teaching assistants were characterised, and common patterns of organisation in schools were described. This section draws on research and commentary which discuss some of the issues arising from the increasing presence of teaching assistants and their developing roles in schools.

Some of the surveys referred to earlier were based on questionnaires or interviews addressed to teachers and headteachers whilst others focused on teaching assistants themselves, instead of or as well as teachers. Not surprisingly, views between the two groups were not always similar. Issues seemed to relate to the following factors:

- changing roles
- status of teaching assistants
- attitudes of teachers
- teamworking
- training and expertise
- employment issues.

The final two factors listed here are discussed in more detail in later sections. In this section, the focus is on some of the difficulties identified and some of the positive ways of working put forward, in relation to the roles of teaching assistants.

### Changing roles

In 1998, the Government announced that 20,000 more assistants would be employed in schools (DfEE, 1998; Rafferty and Barnard, 1998), to provide support to teachers and pupils. Since then, teaching assistants have had an increasingly high profile as both research findings and opinion pieces have been widely publicised by the educational and national press. Articles have related to many of the issues discussed here, namely: status and role, pay and conditions, training, career structure. The teacher unions have expressed concern over the role of teaching assistants, and stressed that they should not be seen as replacements for teachers (Bangs, 2002) or only within a proper career structure (Mansell and Slater, 2002). Meanwhile, UNISON and the Professional Association of Teachers have recruited and supported the teaching assistants themselves, and are putting pressure on employers to improve their pay and conditions of work (McAnea, 2002; Kirkman, 2002).

These changes, combined with the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and the greater inclusion of pupils with a wide range of learning and behavioural difficulties (as discussed in Section 2), mean that teaching assistants are no longer perceived as just an 'an extra pair of hands' (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992), but as valuable members of staff in their own right.

However, this change of role has, inevitably, led to difficulties in adjustment for teaching assistants themselves and for teachers.

## Status of teaching assistants

Teaching assistants come from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of skills and qualifications (Lee and Mawson, 1998; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; O'Brien and Garner, 2001) and may themselves lack confidence in the classroom when they begin. Evidence from some schools indicates (for example, Lorenz, 1998) that teaching assistants may begin work with little information and guidance on their roles and may take some time to understand what is required of them by teachers. When they are working in such an unsupported way, they are unlikely to feel valued by teachers and may be anxious about the effectiveness of their work with pupils (Balshaw, 1991).

If teaching assistants are seen to be an integral part of the school staff and are treated as professionals, they are likely to respond accordingly. If, on the other hand, they are excluded from the teachers' staff room, from relevant meetings and from everyday channels of communication, they are unlikely to feel valued (Ward, 2002). The survey by Lee and Mawson (1998) asked teaching assistants for the aspects of the job they were least happy with: 30 per cent gave reasons related to pay and conditions but 16 per cent cited 'lack of information' and 15 per cent referred to feeling undervalued or a lack of recognition of their contribution.

## Attitudes of teachers

Teachers have not always felt positive about the presence of other adults in the classroom (Balshaw, 1991; Farrell *et al.*, 1999) but have been getting increasingly familiar with the situation as, for some years now, in both primary and secondary schools, teaching assistants have been providing support to pupils with special educational needs and working with teachers to provide support to pupils more generally.

Studies conducted in the 1980s found that teachers were generally pleased to have the support provided by teaching assistants to pupils with special educational needs but admitted that they did not always make the most effective use of this support. This was often due to a lack of time to plan and prepare with the teaching assistants in advance of the lessons (Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996; Derrington *et al.*, 1996; Lorenz, 1998).

Teaching assistants have also commented on teachers' attitudes to them, finding that teachers did not always take account of their skills or past experience, sometimes because they did not consider these at all, though often, again, because of a lack of time for advance preparation (Lee and Mawson, 1998). Some teaching assistants described working collaboratively with teachers and stressed the importance of teamwork (Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001). Others supported that view but pointed out that not all teachers shared it, and when working with a range of different teachers, LSAs had to adapt accordingly (O'Brien and Garner, 2001).

Titles appeared to be important: one teaching assistant in O'Brien and Garner's collection of accounts (2001) described how a child saw her as a 'helper' rather than a 'teacher'. Another described how when she was doing outreach work she gained more respect from teachers if she labelled herself as other than 'LSA'. However, one LSA who had been involved in providing training for SENCOs had found that they subsequently called on her for advice and support, thus raising her self-esteem and encouraging her to think about developing such a role further.

Another difficulty may be that teachers see the role of the teaching assistant as being there to take over responsibility for children with special educational needs, thereby relieving the teacher from this responsibility (Derrington *et al.*, 1996). More recent studies, however, have found that teachers are increasingly accepting and valuing the presence of teaching assistants in their classes to provide support to a wide range of pupils and to the teacher him/herself (Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; OFSTED, 2001, 2002; St J. Neill, 2002; Labour Research Department, 2002).

## Teamwork

The key factor which emerges from the literature is the way in which teachers and teaching assistants perceived their respective roles in terms of teamwork. It is quite clear (Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; St J. Neill, 2002) that both teachers and teaching assistants accept that the teacher has overall responsibility for the class and that s/he should be making the major decisions about the content and delivery of lessons. However, views differ as to whether the teacher is the 'manager' of the teaching assistant in the class or whether the two adults are a team making complementary inputs (see Lacey, 2001). Given the differential nature of teachers' and teaching assistants' qualifications and experience for the job, their distinct conditions of employment, and the legal responsibilities of teachers, it is likely that their unequal formal status will remain, but this does not prevent collaborative working of the kind encouraged and described by many (Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001).

## Effective working

As indicated above, teaching assistants may find it difficult to make a full contribution to lessons when they have no advance information on what will be taking place and, particularly in secondary schools, may themselves find the content of the lesson challenging. Drawing on the literature reviewed, the key factors in promoting opportunities for teaching assistants to work effectively with teachers appear to be:

- ◆ clarity of role, so that teachers, teaching assistants themselves, and pupils know what the role of the teaching assistants is and give it due respect
- ◆ advance planning and discussion so that teaching assistants can carry out appropriate preparation, either for their own benefit (for example, reading a book in advance), or for the benefit of particular pupils for whom they have responsibility or for the benefit of the teacher and other pupils
- ◆ effective communication between teachers and teaching assistants
- ◆ post-lesson discussion and review, including feedback from the teaching assistants to the teachers on the progress or difficulties of particular pupils or groups of pupils
- ◆ ongoing professional development and training for teaching assistants both inside and outside school, allowing them to develop their skills and expertise and thereby enhance the support they can provide to teachers and pupils.

## 7. CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Throughout the previous sections, the discussion has focused on the roles and deployment of teaching assistants, but some of the issues raised have to be looked at in the context of the conditions of employment of teaching assistants.

### Recruitment

Several studies (Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997; Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001) have shown that teaching assistants have often been recruited from amongst parent volunteers or other people who have already been working in the school. This applies particularly to primary schools. This has certain advantages, as the teaching assistants are familiar with the school ethos and organisation before they start and the headteacher and other teachers may know and value the skills and experience of the teaching assistant. However, it does have implications for equal opportunities, as was pointed out by Hancock *et al.* (2001):

*The recruitment process, whereby those known to a school are invited to take on paid assistant work, is convenient for schools but not in the interest of social inclusion. (p.16)*

Their study found that many primary school teaching assistants were recruited in this way. Schools in their study also reported a high response rate to advertisements in LEA circulars and local newspapers.

### Selection criteria

Schools which are able to recruit teaching assistants easily from a pool of existing contacts may not have devised very exacting selection criteria. However, where jobs are to be advertised or there are more potential recruits than posts, it is helpful to use criteria for selection. Studies have found that though headteachers may not have very formal criteria, personal qualities are seen as more important than qualifications and experience (see, for example, Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997; Farrell *et al.*, 1999). The aspects of personal qualities which are particularly relevant include:

- the ability to get on with others
- the ability to work as a team member
- willingness to take the initiative
- experience of working with children
- patience and a sense of humour.

## Job descriptions

In recruiting and employing teaching assistants, schools and LEAs need to ensure that they have drawn up appropriate job descriptions. The importance of a clear job description is stressed by all those researching and commenting in this area (Lorenz, 1998; Balshaw, 1991; Farrell *et al.*, 1999), and some suggest that where staff are currently employed without job descriptions, or with unsatisfactory ones, they should participate in the process of drawing up (new) ones.

Job descriptions should include a clear statement of responsibilities, how time will be allocated, lines of management, and other information relevant to the post and the wider school context.

## Salaries

The ease in recruiting teaching assistants, described above, is somewhat surprising in the light of the salaries on offer to potential and existing employees. For example, the survey of teaching assistants by Lee and Mawson (1998) found that 79 per cent of respondents earned under £7,000 per year. Of course, many teaching assistants were working part time and/or were only paid for term time (for more on this, see below) but nevertheless, as Table 7.1 shows, the salaries were very low. The table combines salary levels with the numbers of hours worked.

**Table 7.1 Teaching assistants' earnings**

Earnings per year combined with number of hours worked per week		Percentage (%) of respondents
Under £7,000	0–15 hours	31
Under £7,000	16–25 hours	36
Under £7,000	Over 25 hours	11
£7,000–£10,000	0–15 hours	1
£7,000–£10,000	16–25 hours	5
£7,000–£10,000	Over 25 hours	7
£10,001–£13,000	0–15 hours	<1
£10,001–£13,000	16–25 hours	1
£10,001–£13,000	Over 25 hours	5
No response		3

*Based on a survey of 767 classroom assistants in primary schools*

Hancock *et al.* (2001) give a figure of average hourly pay of between £5 and £6, with just over one in 20 earning £7–£9 per hour. They also found that 'a small number of assistants were earning under £4 an hour'.

Most recently, the UNISON survey (Labour Research Department, 2002) found that

*overall results indicate that most TAs are limited to a narrow pay band at the bottom of the local government pay scale with minimum annual salaries of between £7,000–8,000 rising to a maximum of £12,000–£13,000. Actual salaries will be lower than this once hours and term-time working are taken into account. (p. 19)*

In several studies (Hancock *et al.*, 2001; O'Brien and Garner, 2001), teaching assistants indicated the need for them to take on additional employment, either in the same school in a different role, such as lunchtime or playground supervisor, or in other occupations elsewhere.

Both Hancock *et al.* (2001) and UNISON (Labour Research Department, 2002) found some limited evidence of pay scales which recognised various roles and qualifications, taking account of progression in these aspects. There was, however, some variety between areas of the country, as the UNISON study makes clear.

Some local authorities are in the process of implementing Single Status reviews whereby all local government workers are to be employed within a common set of employment terms and conditions, and it has been suggested that this might benefit teaching assistants (Hancock *et al.*, 2001).

## **Contractual arrangements**

Not only are the pay scales low, but many teaching assistants are employed on temporary or term time-only contracts. The Lee and Mawson study (1998) found that half of their respondents were on some form of permanent contract, although not all were year-round. This finding was replicated in the study by Hancock *et al.* (2001). They also found that just over a quarter had contracts renewed annually. The 2002 UNISON study found that 40 per cent of schools reported that they did not pay teaching assistants during all holidays and 40 per cent of schools said they used temporary, term-time contracts for teaching assistants (Labour Research Department, 2002).

As is referred to elsewhere in this paper, many teaching assistants were employed to support children with special educational needs, both with and without statements, and their continued employment often depended on the numbers of such children on the school roll at any one time. Hancock *et al.* (2001) also point out that that 'there was strong evidence that most [teaching assistants' contracts] were vulnerable to school budget fluctuations'.



Many teaching assistants are paid only for the hours in which they have direct contact with pupils (Farrell *et al.*, 1999), making it difficult for them to contribute to planning and preparation in the ways advocated in Section 6, and also for them to participate in the wider life of the school. If teaching assistants are unable to be present at staff meetings or assemblies, they could miss vital information or other insights into school issues and events. Several studies (Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001) provide evidence of teaching assistants attending both teacher meetings and other school events in their own time, that is, on a voluntary basis, because of wanting to carry out their job as effectively as possible.

Payment for training and development activities was also variable, as the UNISON survey (Labour Research Department, 2002) found: most LEA respondents indicated that teaching assistants were paid for training taking place outside school hours, whereas 'a significant number of schools (128) said that TAs were not paid for their time when training was carried out outside school hours' (p. 15).

Farrell *et al.* (1999) report that both teaching assistants themselves, and teachers and senior managers, thought that 'pay differentials between themselves and teachers (often as much as £14,000 per year) were far too large and that the differences in their role were not so great as to justify this huge imbalance' (pp. 25–26).

## 8. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The need for teaching assistants to be provided with opportunities for appropriate training and development is a recurrent theme throughout the literature in this area. The issues which emerge and which are discussed below relate to:

- ◆ induction
- ◆ training needs
- ◆ provision and organisation of training
- ◆ difficulties in participating
- ◆ content and delivery
- ◆ accreditation
- ◆ career progression
- ◆ impact of training.

### Induction

In order to support teaching assistants in working effectively, as soon as they join the school, there are a number of policies and practices which schools can put in place. Studies have shown (Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999) that the following activities are helpful:

- pre-employment information and preparation
- clear job description
- clear school policy on support
- identified line manager
- well-planned induction programme
- ongoing support and supervision
- effective communication strategies.

### Training needs

As discussed earlier in this paper, teaching assistants come into their posts with a range of qualifications and experience and therefore their training needs will be affected by that prior expertise. Unfortunately, as OFSTED (2002) points out,

*although the training teaching assistants undertake is often related to the school's needs, for example SEN support or intervention programmes, it is seldom based on any systematic identification of teaching assistants' own needs. (p. 15)*

However, it is possible to derive from the literature reviewed the areas of training need which are commonly identified, such as:

- development of personal and professional skills
- development of knowledge of particular subjects or aspects of subjects
- development of knowledge of particular difficulties and the skills to work with pupils with those difficulties.

It has also been pointed out by many (for example, Balshaw, 1991; Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; OFSTED, 2002) that teachers may also have training needs in relation to working with and managing other adults. Although initial teacher training courses are now required to cover this, most experienced teachers will not have had access to such training. For example, Hancock *et al.* (2001) found that a fifth of primary teachers indicated that they had received some training, but 'many expressed a need for more courses'. The NUT survey (St J. Neill, 2002) also found that 80 per cent had not received training, though 'primary teachers were significantly more likely to have received training than their secondary colleagues. Half the respondents .... felt they needed more training' (p. 17). In this study, respondents were invited to mention the areas in which they felt (more) training was needed, and the most commonly referred to were:

- effective deployment of teaching assistants (indicated by those who felt the need for more training)
- joint recording and assessment
- joint planning
- supervision.

Farrell *et al.* (1999) found that opportunities for teachers to receive training to work with teaching assistants were very limited overall, but that in some of their case study schools 'there was beginning to be a recognition of this need and that training of teachers should go beyond one to one support from the SENCO for an individual colleague or small group such as a faculty team' (p. 46).

Balshaw (1991) and others (Dew-Hughes *et al.*, 1998; Lorenz, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999) point out the importance of teachers and teaching assistants working together both within specific training courses and in other opportunities for professional development. Such collaborative action and development encourages teachers and teaching assistants to learn and develop together, thereby strengthening their relationships and leading to an ethos which supports teamworking and a consistent approach (Lorenz, 1998). The OFSTED (2002) survey reported that 'in a small number of schools, national literacy or numeracy consultants have provided school-based training on how teachers and teaching assistants can work effectively together' (p. 16).

## Provision and organisation of training

The survey by Lee and Mawson (1998) found that almost three-quarters of their respondents (primary teaching assistants) had attended a training course especially for teaching assistants, since 1995. LEA-based training courses were shown to be the most frequently attended (51 per cent of respondents), followed by in-school training (40 per cent). Farrell *et al.* (1999) found that 'nearly 72 per cent of LEAs stated that they offered some form of training to all the LSAs in their authority'. However, though training may be offered, it may not be taken up, and the section below shows some of the reasons teaching assistants may not participate in training.

## Difficulties in participating

Most of the studies which report on training opportunities for teaching assistants also point out some of the reasons why such opportunities may not have been taken up (Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996; Lee and Mawson, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001). The factors identified have been summarised below:

- lack of available courses
- courses for further development inadequate/no provision for more experienced assistants
- courses not providing value for money
- whole-day courses difficult as teaching assistants employed on a part-time basis
- family/childcare commitments
- distance and transport
- cost of course/travel
- not getting paid for time on course
- course full
- no time
- not fulfilling entry requirements
- time constraints, such as courses run in the evening, outside school hours
- courses primarily designed for teachers rather than teaching assistants.

## Content and delivery

Most of the courses offered covered the areas identified above under 'Training needs'. The list below summarises the types of courses listed or described by the research studies reviewed:

- development of personal and professional skills
- development of knowledge of particular subjects or aspects of subjects (such as literacy and numeracy; ICT; modern foreign languages)

- development of materials and activities
- working with teachers
- working with pupils with special educational needs
- working with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- understanding more about specific learning or other difficulties
- assessing, recording and reporting
- health and safety and first aid
- child protection.

(Hargreaves, 1998; Dew-Hughes *et al.*, 1998; Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Hancock *et al.*, 2001; OFSTED, 2002)

Farrell *et al.* (1999) found that LEAs were in a good position to 'tailor their courses to meet the needs of participants', and courses run in assistants' own schools were particularly appreciated. Where teaching assistants were involved in joint training with teachers, views were mixed, with teaching assistants glad to participate in such opportunities but finding, sometimes, that the content, language and style of delivery did not always take account of their needs.

Farrell *et al.* (1999) also provide information on the titles of those teaching the courses for teaching assistants, indicating that these ranged from college staff in FHE courses, and LEA staff on LEA courses, to specialist teachers, behavioural/learning support teachers, educational psychologists and others, including a small proportion of 'experienced LSAs'.

In addition to courses related to the role of teaching assistant, HEIs offer more general courses, such as modules toward first degrees, degree level courses, and those leading towards the acquisition of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (TTA, 2000).

## Accreditation

The study by Farrell *et al.* (1999) showed that, for college and university-based courses, City and Guilds programmes (the Introductory Certificate in Learning Support and the Advanced Certificate in Learning Support) were the most popular, according to providers. LEA-organised courses also were very likely to be accredited by City and Guilds. At that time, relatively few teaching assistants were following Specialist Teacher Assistant courses, whereas Hancock *et al.* (2001) indicated that 'one in ten assistants in LEAs 1 and 2 were involved in a long course of at least one year's duration. The most frequently mentioned was the specialist teacher assistant course' (p. 10).

It is widely agreed that there is a need for a national framework of qualifications and standards, and the Local Government National Training Organisation has developed a set of national occupational standards for teaching assistants (Local Government National Training Organisation,

2001). Award bodies are developing National Vocational Qualifications at levels 2 and 3 based on these standards and 'designed to be relevant to the wide range of roles and responsibilities carried out by teaching/classroom assistants' (LGNTO, 2001, p. 2).

## Career progression

Several studies have shown that teaching assistants are dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities there are for them to develop their career as assistants. For example, although many participate in training and development activities, and some acquire relevant qualifications, the gain in expertise may not be reflected in their status, pay or contractual situation (Lee and Mawson, 1998; Farrell, *et al.*, 1999). However, the recent UNISON survey (Labour Research Department, 2002) found that, in a number of LEAs, pay structures were being introduced which would allow for higher pay to take account of qualifications and status.

In addition to recognition of the development of their skills as teaching assistants, some individuals have found that spending time in schools has led them towards the idea of training for teaching, and the Government has encouraged this. Many teaching assistants are not interested in making this change (Hancock *et al.*, 2001; Farrell *et al.*, 1999), but others are. For example, a study for the Teacher Training Agency by the University of Southampton and Hampshire County Council (Smith *et al.*, 1999) found that 'more students than predicted were interested in going further when they realised that a part-time route to QTS [Qualified Teacher Status] might exist' (p. 4). They found that there were difficulties and the range of training available varied considerably, but overall they concluded that the,

*Graduate and Registered Teachers Programmes (GRTP) appear to be a good route to QTS for classroom assistants wishing to remain in employment. ... Where it has been most successful, partnerships have been set up between LEAs, schools and HEIs [Higher Education Institutions], and actively managed.*

(Smith *et al.*, 1999, p. 4)

## Impact of training

Several studies have found that courses for teaching assistants have had a positive effect on their knowledge and skills, and, in particular, on their confidence (for example, Hutchings, 1997; Hancock *et al.*, 2001). A study by Swann and Loxley in 1998 on a course of school-based training for primary school teaching assistants found that 'students believed the course had had a significant positive impact on their knowledge and understanding of many aspects of teaching and learning, and on their confidence, adaptability and skills in the classroom' (p. 141).

OFSTED (2002) comments on the gains identified by teaching assistants and teachers who participated in DfES Induction Training. The programme involved 'sending new teaching assistants and a senior teacher designated as their mentor to the training and then following it up in school'. The schools had benefited from the schemes, and the teaching assistants had improved both their subject knowledge and their ability to manage pupils' behaviour.

## 9. IMPACT OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Many of the studies referred to in this paper have limited evidence on which to base conclusions about impact. Relatively few studies are therefore referred to in this section, which looks at both the general impact as perceived by teachers and teaching assistants and impact in more specific areas, where data is available.

### Benefits for teaching and learning

Many studies report benefits to pupils and teachers of having teaching assistants in the classroom and working throughout the school. The main benefits are identified by OFSTED (2002) as:

- help in managing behaviour
- help in organising and managing the class, including the use of resources
- having another pair of eyes to pick up and monitor pupils' responses
- having another adult with whom to discuss ideas.

The NUT survey (St J. Neill, 2002) found similar results when teacher respondents were asked: 'What do you think is the most significant benefit of Teaching Assistant support?' Table 9.1 shows the responses (adapted from St J. Neill, 2002).

**Table 9.1 Benefits of teaching assistant support**

<b>Benefits of teaching assistants</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Additional support for pupils	76.7
Reduce teacher workload	9.0
Working partnership with adults	8.0
Parental/community involvement	0.8
Other benefit	0.8
Missing	4.7

*Based on 3,822 respondents*

As indicated earlier in this paper, the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS) in 1999 has led to an increase in the numbers of teaching assistants in schools and the range of tasks carried out by them. OFSTED has been inspecting the implementation and impact of the Strategies, and a report on the second year of the evaluation (OFSTED,



2001) found that, in the context of the National Numeracy Strategy, 'in many classes there is a positive impact on the progress of pupils with whom the teaching assistants are working, particularly in reception classes' (p. 6).

More specifically in relation to this paper, OFSTED also carried out a programme of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the use of primary teaching assistants on the effectiveness of the NLNS (OFSTED, 2002) (see Appendix for details). The findings cover both general aspects of teaching assistants' work and their specific contribution to the NLNS. Comments on training are also made which have been referred to in Section 8.

Overall, OFSTED (2002) indicates that:

*Teaching assistants play an important part in the implementation of the NLNS by supporting teachers and pupils in the classroom. They also have a key role in the intervention and catch-up programmes associated with the strategies.*

*Teachers value highly the support teaching assistants provide and appreciate the benefits of having another adult in the classroom to assist them. (p. 4)*

The report claims that:

*Section 10 inspections show that the presence of teaching assistants improves the quality of teaching. This improvement is most marked when the teaching assistant and teacher work in close partnership or when the teaching assistant is following a tightly prescribed intervention or catch-up programme. Support is least effective when teaching assistants do not have good enough subject knowledge or questioning skills, or where they have problems maintaining discipline. (p. 5)*

A recent study examining pupil–adult differences and educational progress in reception and key stage 1 (Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) found '... no statistical evidence that the number of TAs or other adults in addition to teachers in the classroom have an influence on children's educational progress' (p. 1). However, they suggest that this may be explained by the variability of the use and effectiveness of teaching assistants across the classes they were looking at.

On the other hand, the study found that teachers' views and experiences of teaching assistants were more positive. They felt that teaching assistants contributed in terms of:

- *increased attention and support for learning*
- *increased teaching effectiveness*
- *effective classroom management*
- *effects on children's learning outcomes.*

(Blatchford *et al.*, 2002, p. 3)

## Impact on workload

The NUT survey (St J. Neill, 2002) also asked teacher respondents whether teaching assistants reduced workload: 58 per cent said 'yes'. They went on to indicate the ways in which this happened, as shown in Table 9.2 (adapted from St J. Neill, 2002).

**Table 9.2 Impact of teaching assistants on workload**

Teaching assistants' contribution to reduction of teacher workload	Percentage (%)
Allows more time teaching	37.8
Allows delegation of tasks	22.9
Leads to spending less time teaching	14.1
Other workload benefit	5.0
Provides relief from pupil supervision outside class	1.8
Provides relief from pastoral duties	0.9
Missing	17.4

*Based on 3,822 respondents*

On the other hand, when asked how the use of teaching assistants increased their work, 35 per cent of teachers said that it increased their management responsibilities and 23 per cent indicated that it increased work planning responsibilities.

## Effective working

Farrell *et al.* (1999) draw on the findings from their research to outline the factors underpinning effective practice in the work of learning support assistants. They found that effective practice:

- fosters the participation of pupils in the social and academic processes of the school
- seeks to enable pupils to become more independent learners
- helps to raise standards for all pupils.

They go on to explain that:

*... dimensions of effective practice, defined in this way, are rooted in the work LSAs undertake, **their role**, in the way they are **managed and supported**, and in the quality and availability of **training** they receive. These three dimensions, role, management and training, are inter-connected in a whole series of ways, such that all need to be considered together in order for practice to move forward. (p. 4)*

OFSTED also lists the factors which improve the quality of teaching, in relation to the ways in which teaching assistants and teachers work (OFSTED, 2002). These factors can be summarised as:

- close partnership and planning between teachers and teaching assistants
- teacher planning for teaching assistants' work
- teaching assistants clear about what is expected of them
- clear guidance from teacher and interaction with teacher.

In addition, they see effective teaching assistants as having appropriate subject knowledge and questioning skills, as well as being able to deal with minor behavioural issues.

The findings from Blatchford *et al.* (2002) echo those from Farrell *et al.* (1999) and OFSTED (2002), identifying effectiveness of teaching assistants in terms of four main themes:

- reliability and consistency in classroom support
- need for careful planning
- training which is integrated into classroom practice
- consideration of the deployment of teaching assistants and the kind of contribution they should be making.

The longer-term impact of the work of teaching assistants has yet to be established but the evidence so far is positive. What is also clear is that when teachers and teaching assistants collaborate effectively and work as a team, the effects are beneficial for teachers, pupils and teaching assistants.

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# APPENDIX

## – DETAILS OF MAIN STUDIES

It is not possible to give details of all the books, articles and commentaries reviewed, but the tables below show the size and focus of the more large-scale or influential research studies. This will allow readers to judge for themselves the weight that should be given to the results. They have been arranged chronologically, according to the date of publication of the reports.

**LEE, B. and MAWSON, C. (1998). *Survey of Classroom Assistants*. Slough: NFER.**

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
Questionnaire survey	Summer 1998	Primary headteachers	549	43% response rate
		Primary teaching assistants	767	Two sent to each school for headteacher to distribute – 30% response rate

**NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS (1998). *Associate Staff Support for Teachers*. London: NUT.**

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
Visits to schools	1998	Headteachers, teachers and associate staff	Schools in 5 LEAs. Actual numbers unspecified	'Cross-section of primary and secondary schools'
Interviews	1998	Representatives of national organisations	Numbers unspecified	

FARRELL, P., BALSHAW, M. and POLAT, F. (1999). *The Management, Role and Training of Learning Support Assistants* (DfEE Research Report 161). London: DfEE.

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
Interviews	1998? 1999?	LEA support services staff	4 LEAs	n/a
		Non-resourced mainstream schools – headteachers, teachers, LSAs, parents, governors, pupils	3 primary, 3 secondary	n/a
		Additionally resourced mainstream schools – headteachers, teachers, LSAs, parents, governors, pupils	3 primary, 3 secondary	n/a
		Special schools – headteachers, teachers, LSAs, parents, governors, pupils	3	n/a
		Schools/services maintained by voluntary organisations	2	n/a
Questionnaire survey	?	Training providers in colleges of FHE, universities, LEAs, voluntary organisations	86 LEAs 112 FEs 7 HEs 7 Universities 5 VOs	69% } 66% } response 70% } rates 63% } 56% }



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION (2001). *The National Numeracy Strategy: the Second Year. An Evaluation by HMI* (HMI Report 333). London: OFSTED.**

<b>Data collection exercise(s)</b>	<b>Dates/timing</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Numbers participating</b>	<b>Sampling information</b>
Visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors – interviews and observations  Additional evidence from Section 10 inspections	2000–2001	Interviews with headteachers, mathematics coordinators, teachers; observations of mathematics teaching	200 primary schools	Nationally representative sample

**HANCOCK, R., SWANN, W., MARR, A. and TURNER, J. (2001). *Classroom Assistants in the Primary School: Employment and Deployment*. Milton Keynes: Open University, Faculty of Education and Language Studies.**

<b>Data collection exercise(s)</b>	<b>Dates/timing</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Numbers participating</b>	<b>Sampling information</b>
LEA case studies, analysis of documentation	Feb–Nov 1999	LEA councillors, officers, advisers, inspectors, trade union representatives	38 people in 3 LEAs	n/a
Questionnaire survey and analysis of Form 7 data	Sept 99–Oct 2000	Teaching assistants, teachers, headteachers	275 teaching assistants, 113 teachers, 133 headteachers in 2 LEAs only	5 questionnaires sent to 500 schools in 3 LEAs
School case studies – interviews and observations	June 2000–Jan 2001	Headteachers, teachers, assistants, parents	5 schools	n/a

OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION (2002). *Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools: an Evaluation of the Quality and Impact of their Work* (HMI Report 434) [online]. Available: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/public/index.htm> [23 July, 2002].

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
HMI and Additional Inspector visits – discussions, observations, group discussions	Spring, summer and autumn terms, 2001	Headteachers and/or other people responsible for managing teaching assistants, teaching assistants, teachers	67 primary schools	
Structured telephone interviews	Autumn 2001	Headteachers	35 further primary schools	
Evidence from Section 10 inspections for monitoring the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies				

NEILL, S.R. St.J. (2002). *Teaching Assistants: a Survey Analysed for the National Union of Teachers*. Warwick: University of Warwick, Institute of Education, Teacher Research & Development Unit.

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
Questionnaire survey	2002	Teacher members of the NUT, in all school types	3,822	15,358 sent out – response rate 25%

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT (2002). *Teaching Assistants: a Report on the Role, Pay and Employment Conditions of Teaching Assistants*. London: UNISON.

Data collection exercise(s)	Dates/timing	Participants	Numbers participating	Sampling information
Questionnaire survey	2002	LEA Directors of Education in England and Wales	49 LEAs	29% of the 171 LEAs in England Wales
Questionnaire survey	2002	Headteachers	900 schools	3,500 sent out

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