

Teaching assistants and school support staff – draft composite

UNISON's suggested amendments are in red

Congress notes that the majority of Teaching Assistants in Wales are on part time contracts for 27 hours to 32 hours a week and are generally only contracted for 39 weeks of the year. In contrast teacher's pay is set nationally at a Welsh level, while pay of Teaching Assistants is determined by local authorities creating inequalities between different areas. Consequently, Teaching Assistants typically work significantly longer hours than they are contracted. Therefore, Teaching Assistant's work life balance must be addressed as many have caring responsibilities for young families or elderly relatives resulting in stress and exhaustion while trying to balance work and home commitments.

Teaching Assistants' pay should reflect the significant and valuable contribution that they make to the education of the students in their care. The contracted working day for Teaching Assistants, along with the contracted hours for teachers, should equally reflect the school working day.

The inequality between Teaching Assistants and teachers exacerbates gender inequality as the majority of Teaching Assistants are female. The current pay arrangements condemn these workers to low pay and pay which does not reflect the hours they work, and the skills they use.

Across many local authorities in Wales due to job evaluation and individual pay and grading schemes, school support staff across Wales are on different pay grades resulting in a disparity which can result to be a race to the bottom!

There is also added detriment for some school support staff working in special schools where they are not receiving any recognition for the different role they are required to undertake due to the fact that through job evaluation their special skills and experience have not been recognised.

Congress calls upon the Welsh Government to eradicate this lottery for these dedicated workers and adopt a consistent approach to this workforce, whereby job descriptions, employee specifications and a proper pay and grading scheme will be adopted to recognise the different skills, qualifications and experience across the different roles within the school support staff workforce.

Congress calls upon the Wales TUC to lobby the [Welsh government WLGA](#) to:

- Bring Teaching Assistant pay under national control.
- Pay Teaching Assistants 35 hours a week.
- **Ensure Teaching Assistants' contracts are for the full year rather** than just term-time. 195 days.
- [Harmonise teaching Assistant pay through the councils within Wales](#)
- [Employ Teaching assistants on full contracts to have parity with teachers, including non-contact and preparation time](#)
- Work towards equity between teachers and TAs in the structure supporting payment i.e. the burgundy book which would allow pay portability as well as parity across Wales.

Community: Teaching assistant pay, with UNISON's suggested amendments in red

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GMB: Inequality - School Support Staff

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Discussion Paper on the Role of Teaching Assistant in Welsh Schools July 2021

CONTEXT

The School Support Staff Task & Finish Group grew out of the Schools Social Partnership Forum (SSPF) subgroup which was established to look at the deployment of Support Staff during the pandemic. This paper (July 2021) will focus particularly on Teaching Assistants (TAs). The subgroup's discussions had expanded to include key aspects that have been of concern to school TAs for some considerable time, including deployment, professional learning, impact, and effective practice.

These issues had been covered by Welsh Government-commissioned 'Research into the deployment of primary school support staff in Wales' which reported in 2018. Despite the introduction of registration with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and the creation of Professional Standards for school TAs, recent evidence shows that the position remains largely the same as when the research was undertaken. Furthermore, this paper will not focus on Professional Standards of TAs or HLTAs, rather that the consistency of employment and provision for the workforce across Wales.

The Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group states the following objective:

The aim of the group is to:

Secure evidence to contribute to a wider agenda in reaching a position where there is parity across Wales for TAs in relation to:

- Pay
- Deployment
- Access to training & professional development
- Standardisation of roles'

The identification of these 4 focus areas reflects the high degree of disparity in current arrangements in schools and local authorities throughout Wales. During the work of the T&F Group many overlaps between the areas have been apparent and in particular it is clear that 'Standardisation of Roles' and 'Pay' are closely linked. Therefore, in the narrative Pay and Standardisation of roles are merged, but separate recommendations are identified. This paper summaries the information that the T&F Group has gathered so far, identifies areas where further work is required and makes some interim recommendations.

FOCUS AREAS

1. Standardisation of Roles and Pay Range Classifications

The pay and grading systems within each local authority in Wales are based on the job evaluation process. The job evaluation process produces a score for each post and that score is then allocated to a points range. Points ranges create what are called pay lines and this establishes the cash value for each grade. As a very quick example:

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Grade 7 (GR7), the points range is between 414 and 449, so when a post is evaluated if in this example it scores between that range, it is paid as a GR7 post, therefore a different cash value. Clearly if points are higher or lower than that is a different grade. Please note though that these, salary point ranges will be different in each LA. There is acknowledgement and recognition that Teachers have a national pay structure, whereas TAs have 22 different pay structures across Wales; not giving pay portability to employees who move to a different LA.

In terms of the current work on revising Job Descriptions/Person Specification (JD/PS) for all levels of TAs, once this has been endorsed by the SSPF and Education Cabinet Members, process wise those JD's/ PS would need to go back to local authorities to be reviewed, which is likely to involve a re-evaluation of the roles, which may or may not result in a grade change within that respective local authority.

Each local authority will have a Pay Policy which describes the parameters of how pay works (this is separate to the Schools Pay Policy). Within the policy it references things like secondments and honorariums (these are similar to TLR3 payments) that staff can access if requested to undertake higher graded work. However, secondments and honoraria are short term rewards and if there is a permanent change to an existing post then it should be re-evaluated to check the grade.

A salary analysis of the information we have had on TAs across Wales is shown below:

Grade	Lowest Max Salary value	Median Max Salary value	Highest Max Salary Value
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NJC 37 hrs	£17,364	£18,656	£19,312
32.5 hrs	£13,631	£14,645	£15,160
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32.5 hrs term time	£15,663	£17,895	£21,219
29.5 hrs term time	£14,217	£16,242	£19,260
TA - L4			
NJC 37 hrs	£23,369	£27,093	£31,346
32.5 hrs term time	£18,345	£21,268	£24,607
29.5 hrs term time	£16,650	£19,304	£22,334

In respect of the value shown above:

1. The 37 hours is the maximum salary on the NJC pay scale at full time rates;
2. Most TAs are on 29.5-hour contracts or lower, but the value is reduced both by the hours being a percentage of the full time grade and of course term time working is applied;
3. There are some TAs on 32.5 hrs but again the value is reduced both by the hours being a percentage of the full-time grade and of course term time working is applied;
4. In some local authorities they class a 29.5-hour worker within a school as a full time worker. This does not seem appropriate hence it has been flagged in this paper.
5. In the 2021 National Education Workforce Survey a question was included which asked school learning support worker respondents at which level their contracts of employment were. Responses to the questions will be covered in the resulting survey report when published by the EWC. There is a desire to understand the number of TAs across the different school settings, phases, LAs, language medium etc.

These figures demonstrate that at L3 and L4 the highest maximum salary value is 35% more than the lowest maximum salary value, and that staff at L1 and L2 on the lowest maximum value salaries are earning around £1000 per annum below the median maximum salary value. The Task and Finish Group encourages local authorities to work together with the aim of achieving a consistent level of pay for support staff throughout Wales.

Embedding of guardianship of TAs in their roles in education.

There is variability in consistency in how TAs are deployed by Headteachers, Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) and teachers, and it appears that the level of understanding of the primary purpose of TA roles and their effective use also varies considerably. Disparity of practice between schools and Local Authorities (LAs) leads to TAs being unsure of their role; in contrast the role of a teacher is clear and consistent throughout Wales.

Questions were raised concerning lack of knowledge of the availability and function of honorariums or acting up secondments, there is a quite clear lack of consistent understandings of some of the remits of the role in exercising supervision/teacher cover for un/planned leave. Schools across Wales operate to different standards in relation to the provision of supervision to TAs, which are appropriate avenues for TAs to raise and discuss questions such as these, or others around accessing CPD and other development options such as shadowing. It is the role of the SLT to co-ordinator effective quality assurance (staff voice through feedback is key to this) to ensure standards of provision are consistently high and staff are appropriately trained to deliver this expectation of consistently high standards.

2. Access to training & professional development

TAs being given adequate paid time for training and professional learning.

TAs in schools/settings play an increasingly important role in supporting effective teaching and learning in and out of the classroom. Therefore, TAs should be given the same opportunities as teaching staff for professional development. TAs are given opportunity for appropriate training during INSET days; however feedback suggests less opportunity than teachers during term time.

Appropriate allocation of funds is essential and should be non-negotiable. Professional development opportunities for all staff within a school/setting should be aligned to the school's/setting's priorities. This is the case for the professional development opportunities for teaching staff as in most cases, this is planned and evidenced in School/Departmental Development Plans.

However, this is not the case for the professional development of TAs. Too often, it is reported that TAs are asked or directed to undertake training outside of their normal working hours, and therefore, often unpaid. Professional Development needs to be an integral part of the role for TAs, as is with the teaching profession, therefore there should be equity of opportunity for training across the school community.

Welsh Government should ensure that sufficient resources are made available for the provision of ongoing training for TAs and teachers, and schools, Consortia and LAs should allocate resources equitably and consistently to TA and teachers training.

Ensure TAs are aware of the availability of appropriate training opportunities and the different forms of training.

The Professional Learning Pathways (PLP) is covered by all four regional consortia, that was originated from the HLTA assessment approx. 4-years ago and funded/agreed by Welsh Government. Programmes such as the Teaching Assistant Learning Pathway (TALP – a template has been developed in the Professional Learning Passport at the request of the consortia to support the programme) was then developed and delivered, creating a professional learning vision, fit for the evolving education system in Wales; that covers all Teaching Assistant's (TA's)

within their roles, level of skills and training opportunities. This professional learning pathway was devised into a series of levels, (over a 2-day programme for each step), however a few adaptations were created for remote access:

- Induction - (for any new teaching assistant) (Delivered through playlists tasks, that provides an overview of school structure and language, H&S, accessing EWC passports, how to use social media responsibly, New Curriculum for Wales etc.) - The Code. GPGs
- Practising TAs (Engagement through Google classroom allows TAs to access this site at any time, providing a range of training & reading materials, resources on Hwb, ALN, outdoor learning, with GwE receiving 1,721 take-ups)
- Aspiring HLTA (A x2-Term Developmental Programme, which must include a criteria-of Level 2 in Numeracy and Literacy)
- HLTA Assessment (Comprises of a school visit by an assessor, looking at compared evidence, discussions and making recommendations for the HLTA award)
- Specialised TAs (Existing TAs or becoming HTLA assessors that lead the programme.

These programmes are written and delivered by TAs.

- Educators Wales (<https://educators.wales/professional-learning>) is an additional resource which allows TAs to browse available professional learning opportunities by sector

More work is needed on how to communicate effectively training opportunities to TAs. Headteachers and senior leaders play a key role in accessing training for all staff. When teachers develop and access their professional learning, the priorities are linked to the school's/setting's priorities and are monitored and reviewed through the performance management cycle. Professional conversations take place regarding role responsibilities and expectations, which is a critical part of the professional development of the individual. The same process should apply to TAs to ensure equity and self-worth.

There should be provision within schools to enable TAs to attend training events during school time.

Ensure staff use the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) appropriately to capture and evidence their professional development.

TAs are registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC), using their National Insurance Number (NINO) as a unique identifier unlike schoolteachers who have a teacher reference number (linked to teachers' pensions) and registration provides them with access to the PLP which is a fully flexible tool designed to support them in

capturing, reflecting upon, sharing and planning their learning with the ultimate aim of improving their practice.

Keeping a record of any professional development opportunities and training is important. There needs to be a professional development 'plan'. Consideration needs to be given to the individual's goals for professional learning. Are they looking to get inspired? Build their experience? Make connections or seeking to earn a credential/qualification? These considerations need to be aligned to the school's/setting's priorities. A record helps the individual to not only capture and evidence any training opportunities but could also support the individual with the next steps in their development.

The PLP houses the Welsh Government professional standards for TAs, and it allows any item a practitioner adds to the PLP to map to the relevant professional standards. Visualisation tools assist with an overview of progress against the standards. Schools should be encouraged to take up the training offer provided by the EWC to all schools, on how to effectively use the PLP in their setting.

Headteachers and senior leaders play an important part in communicating the importance of the PLP to their TAs. The Performance Management cycle ensures that appropriate training is planned, captured, evidenced, and shared which promotes effective professional dialogues to take place regarding the individual's professional development. This not only puts the responsibility on Headteachers and senior staff but also on the individual as clear expectations are set from the beginning. Using the administrative functionality in the PLP, the EWC are able to develop bespoke templates in the PLP and only make these available to staff within a specific organisation so it gives Headteachers and TAs the ability to conduct the performance management cycle using the PLP.

Must be collaborative with teachers and provide a sense of worth - relevance and transparent direction of training to the role.

Finding extra time within schools/settings is never easy. Nevertheless, without adequate out-of-class liaison it is difficult for teachers and TAs to work in a complementary way.

The preparedness of TAs relates to their ongoing training and professional development. If a specific pedagogy is being used, such as formative assessment or cooperative learning, TAs should be trained so they fully understand the principles of the approach and the techniques required to apply it.

Training should also be provided for Headteachers, senior leaders and teachers on how to maximise the use of TAs in the classroom.

Consistent approach across all regions - the awareness and consistency in training opportunities (offered by LA & consortia)

Although the training referenced above is offered across Wales, the take up in each region is mixed. The highest take up is evidenced in the North Wales region. Further

investigation is needed to ascertain the reasons behind this. It seems that there is not a consistent approach even if there is a consistent offer.

As mentioned above, more work is needed on how to communicate effectively training opportunities to TAs.

3. Deployment

TAs primary purpose is to support the holistic and academic development of pupils. There is substantial evidence that currently TAs are frequently inappropriately used as substitute teachers –

'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales':

- *'Many TAs (who are not HLTAs) are now being asked to undertake work, such as whole-class teaching, which lies outside of their job descriptions' (para 4.5)*
- *'the majority of LSWs (84 per cent) reported they were asked to provide support without a teacher present' (para 3.16)*

UCL 'Unsung Heroes' report:

- *'During the Winter 2021 lockdown, almost half of TA/Cas (49%) covered staff absences, enabling schools to stay open to vulnerable and key worker children. Just over half (51%) managed a whole class or bubble on their own. Just over a quarter (26%) led larger classes.'*

'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales' - 'For TAs to be deployed most effectively, they should add value to pupils' learning and development and not replace the role of the teacher'.

There is variability in consistency in how TAs are deployed by Headteachers, SLTs and teachers, and it appears that the level of understanding of the primary purpose of TA roles and their effective use also varies considerably. Disparity of practice between schools and local authorities leads to TAs being unsure of their role; in contrast the role of a teacher is clear and consistent throughout Wales.

The research identifies that 'insufficient guidance exists which can help teachers and headteachers to maximize the impact of TAs and that the findings of research undertaken in this area are generally not being utilised' (para 4.20). It needs to be stressed that TAs should not be used to replace the role of the teacher.

Guidance for Headteachers and teachers on the deployment of TAs should highlight most effective / best practice. The Task and Finish group appreciate, if relevant, school leaders can complete a workload assessment to ensure they can plan their approach to addressing issues regarding TAs.

Welsh Government (WG), Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), local authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) have major roles to play in agreement and adoption of guidance on effective deployment

of TAs and in directing schools on implementation. The guidance produced by the Education Endowment Foundation would be a good place to start with for this work.

Appraisals / Development Reviews

At present there is no consistent approach to Appraisals and Development Reviews for TAs. The 'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales' found that 'There is insufficient appraisal of the work of TAs to inform their effective deployment' (Para 4.19). Appraisal of TAs needs to lead to improved professional development – this enables TAs to become to specialists. There is an obvious link with this issue to the section addressing 'Access to training & professional development'.

Consistent deployment of TAs in relation to current policy for teachers

Educational reform introduced Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) policy and Rarely Cover policy in 2007. The purpose of PPA time and Rarely Cover was to enable teachers to raise teaching and learning standards through individual or collaborative professional activity and improve teachers' work/life balance.

The purpose of Rarely Cover was not to use teachers' non-pupil contact time to supervise other classes. Similarly, the purpose of PPA policy was to give teachers the opportunity of undisturbed non-pupil contact time to effectively plan, prepare and assess for pupil progress. Over time, due to varying constraints, the policy of Rarely Cover and PPA has remained but the supervision of the teacher's class during PPA has become less consistent, particularly in primary schools. On a weekly and regular occurrence, which is not in line with the Rarely Cover policy, TAs below Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA/Level 4) status have been deployed to supervise classes without a teacher present. Although the covering person would not plan the lesson, the expectation would be that the covering person would 'teach' the lesson and very often in primary school settings, mark the pupils' books. However, in order to teach in a maintained setting in Wales a person must hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The requirements which need to be met by persons to be recognised as qualified teachers are set out in the Teachers' Qualifications (Wales) Regulations 2012. Therefore, what is happening in reality is not in line with regulation.

Budgetary constraints within schools have often led to long term teacher absence being covered by TAs. The Task and Finish group observed that TAs in this situation often welcomed the opportunity of professional development. It was also confirmed, that in nearly all cases the PPA of the teacher was then given to the covering TAs member. Against policy principles, in these common situations, TAs are performing the role of a teacher – planning, preparing, and assessing pupils work, they should not be carrying out teachers' duties. TAs claim that if they carried out teachers' duties they should be employed and paid accordingly, however this contravenes Sections 15 and 17 of the Education Workforce Council (Main Functions (Wales) Regulations 2015 (Part 3).

Long term or planned-for teacher absence should be covered by staff with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) by engaging a supply teacher; where a teaching assistant is

required to take on work appropriate to a higher level than their contracted role their pay should be adjusted to the appropriate TA grade for the level of responsibility.

The NJC model role profiles for Teaching Assistant 4&5 (HLTA) include Key duties:

- 1. Plan, prepare and deliver specified learning activities to individuals, small groups and/or classes modifying and adapting activities as necessary under the (overall –5) direction and supervision of a teacher*
- 2. Assess, record and report on development, progress and attainment*

The Education Workforce Council (Main Functions) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 Part 3A section 18A states ‘— (1) A school learning support worker is a person who provides the services specified in regulation 17 (“the services”) or supports the provision of the services by a school teacher’ and provides that A person can only be employed as a school learning support worker to provide the above services if **all** of the following requirements are met:

- they are registered with the EWC in the category of school learning support worker;
- they provide the above services with direct interaction with learners to assist or support the work of schoolteachers or nominated teachers in the school;
- they provide the services under the direction and supervision of such schoolteachers or nominated teachers in accordance with arrangements made by the head teacher of the school; and
- the head teacher is satisfied that they have the skills, expertise and experience to provide the services.

The Task and Finish Group is concerned that in many cases TAs are being required to carry out specified work without direction and supervision by a teacher, and when they are not employed at a level that recognises that they have the skills, expertise, and experience to provide the services.

It can be appropriate for TA level 4/5s to provide cover for teachers by leading classes on a pre-planned short-term basis, but this is not suitable for prolonged situations

Since the reduction in specialist external agencies working within schools, TAs have become increasingly responsible for direct intervention. TAs are employed to undertake roles that have evolved to include pastoral support, behaviour management, supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), engaging in 1:1 and group work sessions in both mainstream and specialist provisions. This can be especially apparent in areas such as Speech and Language, and Behaviour Support – Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Teachers often have little knowledge in these areas. TAs are sometimes given lead roles and responsibilities in these areas especially if they have undertaken training. While this may be welcomed by TAs as part of their professional development it would be beyond the role responsibility of a

TA who is not paid at the appropriate grade (eg HLTA) which stipulates responsibility to plan, prepare and deliver. In addition, in many cases there would be an enhancement/TLR when a teacher was taking on such a role.

TAs should be deployed according to their employed status

It is apparent that TAs are often employed at a level that differs from their perceived role; it is important to ensure that they are engaged at the correct level. Local authorities should guide schools to identify the appropriate TA level for the role they require and to appoint staff accordingly. In the aforementioned, the variation of 'pay lines' in awarding job/role levels may also be contributing to the reports of inconsistent deployment of TAs between LAs.

Schools are increasingly proactive in providing training and opportunities for leaders and teaching staff; this can often result in TAs being required to supervise classes without another teacher present. TAs are also increasingly being required to carry out roles of responsibility beyond their job descriptions as a result of pre-planned or prolonged absence. School Leaders need to be reminded that TAs must not be asked to work to roles/responsibilities outside of their job description.

HLTAs commented that they enjoyed the independence of delivering lessons with pre-planned resources by the teacher, however on occasions HLTAs are expected to plan for the lessons. This is outside the job description of the HLTA.

TAs without HLTA roles, often fulfil the role of a HLTA as they are qualified, but do not have a post within the current school setting. TAs commented that they are happy to support the school and it also gives them opportunities to develop their own skills. In this situation, TAs would like to be remunerated for working beyond their substantive role.

Local authorities should have the flexibility and to be able to reflect short term changes without unnecessary burden of bureaucratic administration for school leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short term

Access to training recommendations:

- Improved communication to ensure TAs are made aware by Headteachers and senior leaders of the availability of appropriate training opportunities and the different forms of training.
- School leaders to continue to encourage staff use the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) appropriately to capture and evidence their professional development.
- Consistent and effective training provided for TAs across all consortia.

Deployment Recommendations:

- Update training for School Leaders of all school settings, regarding deployment of TAs linked to their post responsibility and highlighting most effective / best practice.
- Introduction of consistent Appraisal/ Development Reviews of TAs leading to improved professional development and informed deployment.

Medium term

Standardisation Recommendations:

- Consistent role title and job descriptions/person specification (JD/PS) across Wales - remove ambiguity about what is expected in each role. (Link to Professional Standards)
- Job re-evaluation based on these revised JD/PS - consideration given to the new curriculum, ALN reform, blended learning, and different needs of school settings.

Pay Recommendations:

- Explore opportunities for a greater consistency of TAs pay scales across Wales; Local Authorities and parties to the SSPF to work together towards this aim.

Access to training recommendations:

- TAs being given adequate paid time for training and professional learning.
- Ensure that sufficient resources are made available for the provision of ongoing training for TAs and teachers.
- Schools, Consortia and LAs to allocate resources equitably to TA and teachers training.'
- Consistent approach across all regions - the awareness and consistency in training opportunities (offered by LA & consortia).

Deployment Recommendations:

- TAs should be deployed according to their employed status.
- Flexibility in remuneration to reflect short-term changes in role.

NEXT STEPS

1. Further discussion required to distinguish what constitutes appropriate supervision/direction of TAs
2. Undertake / commission work to develop consistent role titles and job descriptions/Person specification
3. To undertake a review of the numbers of TA's who have progressed through to HLTA status and to include evidence of their experiences, training and opportunities on how they progressed in their role.

REFERENCES

Education Workforce Council (EWC)

Welsh Government: Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales

Welsh Government: Research into the Higher-Level Teaching Assistant Scheme

Institute of Education at University College London 'Unsung Heroes' Report

Teachers Union in Wales Survey's

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NJC 37 hrs	£19,953	£22,796	£27,031
32.5 hrs term time	£15,663	£17,895	£21,219
29.5 hrs term time	£14,217	£16,242	£19,260
TA - L4			
NJC 37 hrs	£23,369	£27,093	£31,346
32.5 hrs term time	£18,345	£21,268	£24,607
29.5 hrs term time	£16,650	£19,304	£22,334

In respect of the value shown above:

1. The 37 hours is the maximum salary on the NJC pay scale at full time rates;
2. Most TAs are on 29.5-hour contracts or lower, but the value is reduced both by the hours being a percentage of the full time grade and of course term time working is applied;
3. There are some TAs on 32.5 hrs but again the value is reduced both by the hours being a percentage of the full-time grade and of course term time working is applied;
4. In some local authorities they class a 29.5-hour worker within a school as a full time worker. This does not seem appropriate hence it has been flagged in this paper.
5. In the 2021 National Education Workforce Survey a question was included which asked school learning support worker respondents at which level their contracts of employment were. Responses to the questions will be covered in the resulting survey report when published by the EWC. There is a desire to understand the number of TAs across the different school settings, phases, LAs, language medium etc.

These figures demonstrate that at L3 and L4 the highest maximum salary value is 35% more than the lowest maximum salary value, and that staff at L1 and L2 on the lowest maximum value salaries are earning around £1000 per annum below the median maximum salary value. The Task and Finish Group encourages local authorities to work together with the aim of achieving a consistent level of pay for support staff throughout Wales.

Embedding of guardianship of TAs in their roles in education.

There is variability in consistency in how TAs are deployed by Headteachers, Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) and teachers, and it appears that the level of understanding of the primary purpose of TA roles and their effective use also varies considerably. Disparity of practice between schools and Local Authorities (LAs) leads to TAs being unsure of their role; in contrast the role of a teacher is clear and consistent throughout Wales.

Questions were raised concerning lack of knowledge of the availability and function of honorariums or acting up secondments, there is a quite clear lack of consistent understandings of some of the remits of the role in exercising supervision/teacher cover for un/planned leave. Schools across Wales operate to different standards in relation to the provision of supervision to TAs, which are appropriate avenues for TAs to raise and discuss questions such as these, or others around accessing CPD and other development options such as shadowing. It is the role of the SLT to co-ordinator effective quality assurance (staff voice through feedback is key to this) to ensure standards of provision are consistently high and staff are appropriately trained to deliver this expectation of consistently high standards.

2. Access to training & professional development

TAs being given adequate paid time for training and professional learning.

TAs in schools/settings play an increasingly important role in supporting effective teaching and learning in and out of the classroom. Therefore, TAs should be given the same opportunities as teaching staff for professional development. TAs are given opportunity for appropriate training during INSET days; however feedback suggests less opportunity than teachers during term time.

Appropriate allocation of funds is essential and should be non-negotiable. Professional development opportunities for all staff within a school/setting should be aligned to the school's/setting's priorities. This is the case for the professional development opportunities for teaching staff as in most cases, this is planned and evidenced in School/Departmental Development Plans.

However, this is not the case for the professional development of TAs. Too often, it is reported that TAs are asked or directed to undertake training outside of their normal working hours, and therefore, often unpaid. Professional Development needs to be an integral part of the role for TAs, as is with the teaching profession, therefore there should be equity of opportunity for training across the school community.

Welsh Government should ensure that sufficient resources are made available for the provision of ongoing training for TAs and teachers, and schools, Consortia and LAs should allocate resources equitably and consistently to TA and teachers training.

Ensure TAs are aware of the availability of appropriate training opportunities and the different forms of training.

The Professional Learning Pathways (PLP) is covered by all four regional consortia, that was originated from the HLTA assessment approx. 4-years ago and funded/agreed by Welsh Government. Programmes such as the Teaching Assistant Learning Pathway (TALP – a template has been developed in the Professional Learning Passport at the request of the consortia to support the programme) was then developed and delivered, creating a professional learning vision, fit for the evolving education system in Wales; that covers all Teaching Assistant's (TA's)

within their roles, level of skills and training opportunities. This professional learning pathway was devised into a series of levels, (over a 2-day programme for each step), however a few adaptations were created for remote access:

- Induction - (for any new teaching assistant) (Delivered through playlists tasks, that provides an overview of school structure and language, H&S, accessing EWC passports, how to use social media responsibly, New Curriculum for Wales etc.) - The Code. GPGs
- Practising TAs (Engagement through Google classroom allows TAs to access this site at any time, providing a range of training & reading materials, resources on Hwb, ALN, outdoor learning, with GwE receiving 1,721 take-ups)
- Aspiring HLTA (A x2-Term Developmental Programme, which must include a criteria-of Level 2 in Numeracy and Literacy)
- HLTA Assessment (Comprises of a school visit by an assessor, looking at compared evidence, discussions and making recommendations for the HLTA award)
- Specialised TAs (Existing TAs or becoming HTLA assessors that lead the programme.

These programmes are written and delivered by TAs.

- Educators Wales (<https://educators.wales/professional-learning>) is an additional resource which allows TAs to browse available professional learning opportunities by sector

More work is needed on how to communicate effectively training opportunities to TAs. Headteachers and senior leaders play a key role in accessing training for all staff. When teachers develop and access their professional learning, the priorities are linked to the school's/setting's priorities and are monitored and reviewed through the performance management cycle. Professional conversations take place regarding role responsibilities and expectations, which is a critical part of the professional development of the individual. The same process should apply to TAs to ensure equity and self-worth.

There should be provision within schools to enable TAs to attend training events during school time.

Ensure staff use the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) appropriately to capture and evidence their professional development.

TAs are registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC), using their National Insurance Number (NINO) as a unique identifier unlike schoolteachers who have a teacher reference number (linked to teachers' pensions) and registration provides them with access to the PLP which is a fully flexible tool designed to support them in

capturing, reflecting upon, sharing and planning their learning with the ultimate aim of improving their practice.

Keeping a record of any professional development opportunities and training is important. There needs to be a professional development 'plan'. Consideration needs to be given to the individual's goals for professional learning. Are they looking to get inspired? Build their experience? Make connections or seeking to earn a credential/qualification? These considerations need to be aligned to the school's/setting's priorities. A record helps the individual to not only capture and evidence any training opportunities but could also support the individual with the next steps in their development.

The PLP houses the Welsh Government professional standards for TAs, and it allows any item a practitioner adds to the PLP to map to the relevant professional standards. Visualisation tools assist with an overview of progress against the standards. Schools should be encouraged to take up the training offer provided by the EWC to all schools, on how to effectively use the PLP in their setting.

Headteachers and senior leaders play an important part in communicating the importance of the PLP to their TAs. The Performance Management cycle ensures that appropriate training is planned, captured, evidenced, and shared which promotes effective professional dialogues to take place regarding the individual's professional development. This not only puts the responsibility on Headteachers and senior staff but also on the individual as clear expectations are set from the beginning. Using the administrative functionality in the PLP, the EWC are able to develop bespoke templates in the PLP and only make these available to staff within a specific organisation so it gives Headteachers and TAs the ability to conduct the performance management cycle using the PLP.

Must be collaborative with teachers and provide a sense of worth - relevance and transparent direction of training to the role.

Finding extra time within schools/settings is never easy. Nevertheless, without adequate out-of-class liaison it is difficult for teachers and TAs to work in a complementary way.

The preparedness of TAs relates to their ongoing training and professional development. If a specific pedagogy is being used, such as formative assessment or cooperative learning, TAs should be trained so they fully understand the principles of the approach and the techniques required to apply it.

Training should also be provided for Headteachers, senior leaders and teachers on how to maximise the use of TAs in the classroom.

Consistent approach across all regions - the awareness and consistency in training opportunities (offered by LA & consortia)

Although the training referenced above is offered across Wales, the take up in each region is mixed. The highest take up is evidenced in the North Wales region. Further

investigation is needed to ascertain the reasons behind this. It seems that there is not a consistent approach even if there is a consistent offer.

As mentioned above, more work is needed on how to communicate effectively training opportunities to TAs.

3. Deployment

TAs primary purpose is to support the holistic and academic development of pupils. There is substantial evidence that currently TAs are frequently inappropriately used as substitute teachers –

'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales':

- *'Many TAs (who are not HLTAs) are now being asked to undertake work, such as whole-class teaching, which lies outside of their job descriptions' (para 4.5)*
- *'the majority of LSWs (84 per cent) reported they were asked to provide support without a teacher present' (para 3.16)*

UCL 'Unsung Heroes' report:

- *'During the Winter 2021 lockdown, almost half of TA/Cas (49%) covered staff absences, enabling schools to stay open to vulnerable and key worker children. Just over half (51%) managed a whole class or bubble on their own. Just over a quarter (26%) led larger classes.'*

'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales' - 'For TAs to be deployed most effectively, they should add value to pupils' learning and development and not replace the role of the teacher'.

There is variability in consistency in how TAs are deployed by Headteachers, SLTs and teachers, and it appears that the level of understanding of the primary purpose of TA roles and their effective use also varies considerably. Disparity of practice between schools and local authorities leads to TAs being unsure of their role; in contrast the role of a teacher is clear and consistent throughout Wales.

The research identifies that 'insufficient guidance exists which can help teachers and headteachers to maximize the impact of TAs and that the findings of research undertaken in this area are generally not being utilised' (para 4.20). It needs to be stressed that TAs should not be used to replace the role of the teacher.

Guidance for Headteachers and teachers on the deployment of TAs should highlight most effective / best practice. The Task and Finish group appreciate, if relevant, school leaders can complete a workload assessment to ensure they can plan their approach to addressing issues regarding TAs.

Welsh Government (WG), Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), local authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) have major roles to play in agreement and adoption of guidance on effective deployment

of TAs and in directing schools on implementation. The guidance produced by the Education Endowment Foundation would be a good place to start with for this work.

Appraisals / Development Reviews

At present there is no consistent approach to Appraisals and Development Reviews for TAs. The 'Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales' found that 'There is insufficient appraisal of the work of TAs to inform their effective deployment' (Para 4.19). Appraisal of TAs needs to lead to improved professional development – this enables TAs to become to specialists. There is an obvious link with this issue to the section addressing 'Access to training & professional development'.

Consistent deployment of TAs in relation to current policy for teachers

Educational reform introduced Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) policy and Rarely Cover policy in 2007. The purpose of PPA time and Rarely Cover was to enable teachers to raise teaching and learning standards through individual or collaborative professional activity and improve teachers' work/life balance.

The purpose of Rarely Cover was not to use teachers' non-pupil contact time to supervise other classes. Similarly, the purpose of PPA policy was to give teachers the opportunity of undisturbed non-pupil contact time to effectively plan, prepare and assess for pupil progress. Over time, due to varying constraints, the policy of Rarely Cover and PPA has remained but the supervision of the teacher's class during PPA has become less consistent, particularly in primary schools. On a weekly and regular occurrence, which is not in line with the Rarely Cover policy, TAs below Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA/Level 4) status have been deployed to supervise classes without a teacher present. Although the covering person would not plan the lesson, the expectation would be that the covering person would 'teach' the lesson and very often in primary school settings, mark the pupils' books. However, in order to teach in a maintained setting in Wales a person must hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The requirements which need to be met by persons to be recognised as qualified teachers are set out in the Teachers' Qualifications (Wales) Regulations 2012. Therefore, what is happening in reality is not in line with regulation.

Budgetary constraints within schools have often led to long term teacher absence being covered by TAs. The Task and Finish group observed that TAs in this situation often welcomed the opportunity of professional development. It was also confirmed, that in nearly all cases the PPA of the teacher was then given to the covering TAs member. Against policy principles, in these common situations, TAs are performing the role of a teacher – planning, preparing, and assessing pupils work, they should not be carrying out teachers' duties. TAs claim that if they carried out teachers' duties they should be employed and paid accordingly, however this contravenes Sections 15 and 17 of the Education Workforce Council (Main Functions (Wales) Regulations 2015 (Part 3).

Long term or planned-for teacher absence should be covered by staff with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) by engaging a supply teacher; where a teaching assistant is

required to take on work appropriate to a higher level than their contracted role their pay should be adjusted to the appropriate TA grade for the level of responsibility.

The NJC model role profiles for Teaching Assistant 4&5 (HLTA) include Key duties:

- 1. Plan, prepare and deliver specified learning activities to individuals, small groups and/or classes modifying and adapting activities as necessary under the (overall –5) direction and supervision of a teacher*
- 2. Assess, record and report on development, progress and attainment*

The Education Workforce Council (Main Functions) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 Part 3A section 18A states ‘— (1) A school learning support worker is a person who provides the services specified in regulation 17 (“the services”) or supports the provision of the services by a school teacher’ and provides that A person can only be employed as a school learning support worker to provide the above services if **all** of the following requirements are met:

- they are registered with the EWC in the category of school learning support worker;
- they provide the above services with direct interaction with learners to assist or support the work of schoolteachers or nominated teachers in the school;
- they provide the services under the direction and supervision of such schoolteachers or nominated teachers in accordance with arrangements made by the head teacher of the school; and
- the head teacher is satisfied that they have the skills, expertise and experience to provide the services.

The Task and Finish Group is concerned that in many cases TAs are being required to carry out specified work without direction and supervision by a teacher, and when they are not employed at a level that recognises that they have the skills, expertise, and experience to provide the services.

It can be appropriate for TA level 4/5s to provide cover for teachers by leading classes on a pre-planned short-term basis, but this is not suitable for prolonged situations

Since the reduction in specialist external agencies working within schools, TAs have become increasingly responsible for direct intervention. TAs are employed to undertake roles that have evolved to include pastoral support, behaviour management, supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), engaging in 1:1 and group work sessions in both mainstream and specialist provisions. This can be especially apparent in areas such as Speech and Language, and Behaviour Support – Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Teachers often have little knowledge in these areas. TAs are sometimes given lead roles and responsibilities in these areas especially if they have undertaken training. While this may be welcomed by TAs as part of their professional development it would be beyond the role responsibility of a

TA who is not paid at the appropriate grade (eg HLTA) which stipulates responsibility to plan, prepare and deliver. In addition, in many cases there would be an enhancement/TLR when a teacher was taking on such a role.

TAs should be deployed according to their employed status

It is apparent that TAs are often employed at a level that differs from their perceived role; it is important to ensure that they are engaged at the correct level. Local authorities should guide schools to identify the appropriate TA level for the role they require and to appoint staff accordingly. In the aforementioned, the variation of 'pay lines' in awarding job/role levels may also be contributing to the reports of inconsistent deployment of TAs between LAs.

Schools are increasingly proactive in providing training and opportunities for leaders and teaching staff; this can often result in TAs being required to supervise classes without another teacher present. TAs are also increasingly being required to carry out roles of responsibility beyond their job descriptions as a result of pre-planned or prolonged absence. School Leaders need to be reminded that TAs must not be asked to work to roles/responsibilities outside of their job description.

HLTAs commented that they enjoyed the independence of delivering lessons with pre-planned resources by the teacher, however on occasions HLTAs are expected to plan for the lessons. This is outside the job description of the HLTA.

TAs without HLTA roles, often fulfil the role of a HLTA as they are qualified, but do not have a post within the current school setting. TAs commented that they are happy to support the school and it also gives them opportunities to develop their own skills. In this situation, TAs would like to be remunerated for working beyond their substantive role.

Local authorities should have the flexibility and to be able to reflect short term changes without unnecessary burden of bureaucratic administration for school leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short term

Access to training recommendations:

- Improved communication to ensure TAs are made aware by Headteachers and senior leaders of the availability of appropriate training opportunities and the different forms of training.
- School leaders to continue to encourage staff use the Professional Learning Passport (PLP) appropriately to capture and evidence their professional development.
- Consistent and effective training provided for TAs across all consortia.

Deployment Recommendations:

- Update training for School Leaders of all school settings, regarding deployment of TAs linked to their post responsibility and highlighting most effective / best practice.
- Introduction of consistent Appraisal/ Development Reviews of TAs leading to improved professional development and informed deployment.

Medium term

Standardisation Recommendations:

- Consistent role title and job descriptions/person specification (JD/PS) across Wales - remove ambiguity about what is expected in each role. (Link to Professional Standards)
- Job re-evaluation based on these revised JD/PS - consideration given to the new curriculum, ALN reform, blended learning, and different needs of school settings.

Pay Recommendations:

- Explore opportunities for a greater consistency of TAs pay scales across Wales; Local Authorities and parties to the SSPF to work together towards this aim.

Access to training recommendations:

- TAs being given adequate paid time for training and professional learning.
- Ensure that sufficient resources are made available for the provision of ongoing training for TAs and teachers.
- Schools, Consortia and LAs to allocate resources equitably to TA and teachers training.'
- Consistent approach across all regions - the awareness and consistency in training opportunities (offered by LA & consortia).

Deployment Recommendations:

- TAs should be deployed according to their employed status.
- Flexibility in remuneration to reflect short-term changes in role.

NEXT STEPS

1. Further discussion required to distinguish what constitutes appropriate supervision/direction of TAs
2. Undertake / commission work to develop consistent role titles and job descriptions/Person specification
3. To undertake a review of the numbers of TA's who have progressed through to HLTA status and to include evidence of their experiences, training and opportunities on how they progressed in their role.

REFERENCES

Education Workforce Council (EWC)

Welsh Government: Research into the deployment of primary school TAs in Wales

Welsh Government: Research into the Higher-Level Teaching Assistant Scheme

Institute of Education at University College London 'Unsung Heroes' Report

Teachers Union in Wales Survey's