

Raising Standards and Tackling Workload Implementing the National Agreement

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department for
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EFFECTIVE DEPLOYMENT OF HIGHER LEVEL TEACHING ASSISTANTS TO HELP RAISE STANDARDS

The Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG)¹ welcomes the fact that almost 12,000 staff working in schools have now been awarded higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status. Given that the majority of these were able to show that they already met the Standards without requiring additional training it is an indication of the high skill level prevalent among support staff working in schools. WAMG wants to see that these skills are being used to their full potential in order to help raise standards.

Candidates seeking to attain HLTA status have to successfully demonstrate that they meet 31 national professional standards. These assess 'professional values and practice', 'knowledge and understanding' and 'teaching and learning activities'. HLTAs can, therefore, take on higher level tasks and responsibilities that reflect their level of expertise – this includes working with individual pupils, small groups and whole classes. In deploying support staff to HLTA-type roles, schools should have regard to The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2003 or The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2004.

However, many schools only seem to see the role of HLTAs in connection with a teacher's planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, when an HLTA may take responsibility for a whole class in the planned absence of a teacher. This narrow view of the HLTA role has a number of potential drawbacks, because the skills demonstrated by HLTAs against the national standards are not being fully utilised:

- (a) Teaching assistants (TAs), or other members of support staff, with HLTA status find that there is no role for them when schools use other strategies for managing teachers' PPA time. This can mean that the HLTA's level of skills and experience are not being used to the full to raise standards.
- (b) HLTAs find themselves teaching whole classes all or most of their time because they are exclusively deployed during the PPA time of different teachers. This means that the HLTA is effectively working as a teacher. This, however, is not the role of an HLTA who is an assistant to a teacher or department, even though she works in a more independent role compared to other TAs.
- (c) TAs with HLTA status are issued with split contracts where a TA is deployed to do higher level work with a whole class for part of the week and paid a higher rate for this and is then deployed the rest of the week as a general TA at a lower level of pay. This is based on the assumption that HLTA work only relates to working with a whole class. However, if a TA has the skill and knowledge to take a whole class she clearly has a range of skills which can also be used in a variety of settings supporting the work of teachers. Previous WAMG advice on this states that casual arrangements – which give to TAs who meet the HLTA standards enhanced pay only for those hours when they are deployed with whole classes to provide PPA time for teachers – are not in line with the aims of workforce reform and the principles of the National Agreement. Therefore, schools should consider whether they have a broader range of work which would enable them to maximise their use of an HLTA's skills or, indeed, whether these resources could be used more widely in collaboration with other schools.



NASUWT

NEOST

PAT
Professional Association of Teachers



¹ The Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group is composed of representatives from ASCL, ATL, DfES, GMB, NASUWT, NEOST, PAT, T&G, UNISON and the Welsh Assembly Government, who are all signatories to the Agreement.

Some schools, particularly small primary schools may only require an HLTA for part of the school week. For example, a school may wish to employ an HLTA for 20 hours. Whilst part of this time can be used for taking whole classes, this time can also be used for working with individual pupils and small groups, using the full range of skills and knowledge for which HLTA status was awarded.

WAMG is keen that the skills of an HLTA are not limited to working with whole classes and wants to see the development of wider roles for HLTAs. A more effective deployment of HLTAs throughout the school will make better use of the skills of HLTAs and can thus help raise standards of achievement. This will be increasingly crucial when developing personalised learning strategies for pupils.

In order to promote the development of wider roles for HLTAs we list some examples of HLTA work in different contexts. These are all based on real case studies.

HLTAs are already working in the following roles:

- Working as organisers of a transition programme for pupils from pre-school to school, infant to junior or primary to secondary school.
- Devising learning plans for children with special educational needs to enable teaching colleagues to deliver more effective teaching, e.g. devising plans with a kinaesthetic approach.
- Working with pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and helping with the inclusion of children from very diverse backgrounds, thus creating positive relationships between home and school.
- Being responsible for ICT management; in collaboration with teachers, teaching whole classes on ICT and assessing pupils; giving information and advice on new ICT products; giving tailored ICT support for pupils with SEN.
- Developing a peer mediation system to tackle and resolve conflicts between pupils, and training pupil mediators.
- Putting together study guides on English novels for less able students in collaboration with teachers.
- Supporting pupils during the award scheme development and accreditation network scheme which offers key vocational skills to those doing only core GCSE subjects by producing worksheets and giving general support.
- Acting as specialists in counselling and managing EBD, provide team-teach training for colleagues working in pupil support centres.

Further case studies can be found on the TDA website at www.tda.gov.uk/support/hlta/professstandards/meetingthestandards.aspx.

The National Agreement explicitly recognises that support staff should receive remuneration that reflects their level of training, skills and responsibilities – and this is particularly important as higher level roles develop. WAMG recognises that HLTAs can be deployed in part-time roles but it is important in the interest of using the full range of skills of staff that they are appropriately deployed and rewarded.

Cover supervision and timetabled strategies for PPA time

There is still confusion between cover supervision for a teacher's short-term absence and timetabled strategies for providing teachers with guaranteed PPA time. Whilst the former is not a good use of an HLTAs skills, the latter needs the skills of an HLTAs because this time needs to be committed to the curriculum. The expression "cover for PPA", which is often used, in fact blurs the two different activities. The crucial differences between the two concepts are that:

- during a teacher's PPA time an HLTAs will be actively delivering a lesson/undertaking elements of 'specified work' whereas where a member of support staff is covering for short-term teacher absence they will solely be supervising a class or lesson; and
- PPA time is a regular occurrence and, therefore, the 'cover' of these lessons needs to be timetabled. This is not short term and is not short notice.

There are a number of strategies a headteacher can use for PPA time but if a TA takes a class during this time she should be paid at a level 4 (assuming a 4-level career structure as proposed by the NJC job profiles).

