
THE RECRUITMENT, DEPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SUPPLY TEACHERS IN ENGLAND

Merryn Hutchings¹, Kathy James¹, Uvanney Maylor¹, Ian Menter² and Sarah Smart¹
1 Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University
2 University of Glasgow

Introduction

In November 2004 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the Institute for Policy Studies in Education at London Metropolitan University to undertake research into the recruitment, deployment and management of supply teachers in England. The focus of the research was on supply teachers undertaking placements of no more than one term. Data collection took place between January and October 2005.

Key findings

- The survey data suggests that on average, secondary schools use 295 supply teacher days a year, and primary schools, 82 days. These days are mainly used to cover short-term teacher sickness (42% of supply teacher days in primary schools, 54% in secondary) and professional development activity (41% in primary, but only 17% in secondary, where greater use is made of internal cover for this purpose).
- In early 2005, 10% of primary and 33% of secondary schools regularly used support staff to provide cover. At that date, workforce remodelling had led to slight or large increases in over 40% of the schools.
- On *short* placements, 97% of secondary schools expect supply teachers to supervise set work, and 75% do not aim to achieve a subject match; 94% of primary schools expect them to teach using lesson or weekly plans.
- Most schools prefer using local and familiar supply teachers that they contact directly; 65% of primary and 42% of secondary schools use mainly such teachers. This is much more common in schools in rural areas and those with low free schools meals eligibility. Urban and challenging schools generally obtain teachers through agencies. Challenging schools are often charged more by agencies for supply teachers.
- Very few schools select agencies using Preferred Supplier Lists (15%) or the Quality Mark (8%). Agencies consider the latter a specification of minimum standards rather than indicating high quality.
- Using the survey data, it is estimated that over 40,000 supply teachers are active in England, working an average of 2.9 days a week in six different schools over a year.
- Half the supply teachers are aged 50 or older: the older the teacher, the fewer days they work per week. A quarter of the whole sample work in just one school, often one they have previously worked in.
- Fifty-six percent of supply teachers mainly work directly for schools: 31% mainly through private supply agencies and 9% through LEA supply services. Younger and less experienced teachers tend to work through agencies and in more challenging situations, while older and more experienced teachers tend to work directly for schools that are generally less challenging.
- Supply teachers report varying levels of support from schools. Only 34% of supply teachers had experienced any CPD in the previous year.
- In early 2005 the gross daily pay of supply teachers working mainly through private agencies was £119 (London) / £114 (elsewhere). Those working through LEAs or directly for schools (paid on national pay scales) were paid £140 (London) / £132 (elsewhere). Those aged 20-29 earned more by working through agencies; all others earned more on national scales.
- Fifty-five percent of supply teachers under 60 are not making any pension contributions. This includes 40% of those who are eligible to contribute to the Teachers Pension Scheme.

- The majority (77 %) of supply teachers are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with most aspects of their work. Older teachers tend to be more satisfied (88% of over 60s); least satisfied are those aged 20-29 (67%).
- Fourteen percent of supply teachers would prefer to be in full-time, and 17% in part-time, permanent teaching posts. The main factors that might persuade those who do not currently want to do so to join or return to the permanent sector are a reduction in workload (69%) and better behaviour management in schools (61%).

Aims

The aims of this research were:

- to address the shortfalls and gaps in the data on the characteristics, recruitment, deployment, management and development of supply staff;
- to identify good practice in the areas listed above for dissemination; and
- to explore supply teachers' motivations for taking up this work, and any barriers or incentives that may prevent or encourage them from returning to or joining the permanent teaching sector.

Context

In the years since 2000 the DfES has taken a number of steps to try and increase quality of the recruitment, deployment and management of supply teachers. These include the introduction of a Quality Mark for agencies and LEAs (DfES, 2004); provision of self-study materials for supply teachers; and guidance to schools, *Using Supply Teachers to Cover Short-term Absences* (DfES, 2002a). At the same time, wider education policies have impacted on the work of supply teachers: in particular, the National Agreement *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (DfES, 2003). Changes introduced as a result of the National Agreement allow schools to deploy support staff with appropriate skills, expertise and training to provide 'cover supervision' and/or undertake specified teaching activities under the direction and supervision of a teacher. Other changes outlined in the National Agreement provide annual limits to the amount of cover for absent colleagues that teachers are allowed to carry out, and give all

teachers a guaranteed amount of time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA). Among the objectives of this research was to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Research design

The research design involved collection of quantitative and qualitative data in each of the following three strands:

- *LEAs and agencies:* A survey of all LEAs was conducted, achieving a 55% response rate. Interviews were conducted in ten LEAs with varying forms of supply teacher provision, and in eleven private supply agencies, including national and local agencies.
- *Schools:* A survey of a national sample of schools was conducted (completed by the member of staff with responsibility for supply teachers); this was designed to include equal numbers of primary and secondary schools, and smaller numbers of special and nursery schools. In total 1375 responses were analysed. Case studies were conducted in twenty schools: these included interviews with the member of staff responsible for supply teachers, and where possible, with any supply teachers in school, and a review of relevant documentation and records.
- *Supply teachers:* A survey of a national sample of supply teachers was conducted. Questionnaires were sent to schools: headteachers were asked to distribute them to the next four (secondary) or two (primary) supply teachers in the school. A total of 1554 responses were analysed. Qualitative research included nine focus groups, each with five supply teachers who were employed for a day, and an additional nine telephone interviews with supply teachers whose particular patterns of work had not been represented in the groups.

Surveys were conducted in January - March 2005; qualitative work took place from March to October.

Findings

Schools' use of supply teachers and the impact of the remodelling agenda

There are differences between school sectors in the extent to which supply teachers are used (mean number of supply teacher days used in 2004: primary, 82; secondary, 295). There is also a considerable range of use within each sector. The number of supply days used is positively, though not strongly, correlated with

size of school; it is also related to the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in primary schools (the schools with the highest percentage use more supply teachers); and to GCSE results in secondary schools (schools with over 65% 5A*-C grades use fewer supply teachers). These relationships are statistically significant.

In nursery and primary schools, 42% of supply days were used to cover sickness. In secondary and schools this was 54%. Professional development accounts for 41% of supply day use in primary schools, but only 17% in secondary, where greater use is made of internal cover for this purpose. There were some suggestions in the qualitative data that some schools were using supply teachers to cover for PPA time, but this did not appear to be a widespread practice; however, only a minority of the data was collected after September 2005 when PPA time became statutory.

Data relating to different ways of providing cover was examined. In February-March 2005, secondary schools reported the greatest use of all forms of cover, with 95% using internal regular teachers at least once a week, 86% using supply teachers and 33% using support staff. Comparable figures for primary schools were 24%, 45% and 10%.

At that date, over 40% of the schools surveyed reported an increase in the use of support staff following the National Agreement. Fewer schools in London reported any increase; this was statistically significant, and appeared to be partly related to their view that their support staff were not sufficiently skilled or trained. The questionnaire and school case studies indicated that many schools (particularly in the primary sector) did not want to use support staff to provide cover. There was evidence that some supply teachers were finding less work than previously.

Organisations that provide supply teachers

There is no definitive list of private supply agencies; there appear to be well over a hundred in operation but the list is constantly changing. There is considerable variation in the scale of operation, with a few large companies operating nationally and dominating the market, and a large number of smaller local and specialist companies. The provision of a quality service is a major concern for agencies; in relation to quality of deployment, some agencies laid greater emphasis on personal relationships

while others emphasised effective IT systems. The Quality Mark was seen by agencies as a minimum definition of quality, and a useful guide for new agencies. Many agencies would welcome a more rigorous process of quality assurance.

Approximately one third of local authorities surveyed ran supply services / agencies within the LEA or with other LEAs, and approximately one third through an arrangement with a private supply agency. Very few local authority supply services / agencies have been awarded the Quality Mark; some were not aware that they were eligible, and some felt that their small-scale service would not meet the criteria.

Recruitment

Most supply teachers had approached an agency, LEA or school directly when they entered supply teaching. Their choice of which organisation(s) to approach were often constrained by their knowledge of which organisations supplied local schools. More than two-thirds of the schools in the sample had recruited supply teachers, including former members of staff (63%), and parents (20% of nursery and primary schools). Word of mouth and recommendation had been used by a fifth of the schools, and a tenth had advertised for supply teachers. These strategies indicate the importance that schools accord to building up a group of supply teachers who can be used in the school on a regular basis.

Deployment to schools

Overall responsibility for cover in a school normally rests with a member of the management team (generally the headteacher in a primary school and an assistant or deputy head in a secondary school). The practical arrangements are most often made by support staff. The role of support staff in both managing and arranging cover appears to be increasing with workforce reform. There were some tensions between the notion of arranging cover as essentially a data exercise, and the idea that deciding who teaches which class is an important aspect of teaching and learning, and should therefore be managed by a senior member of teaching staff.

About two-thirds of all schools said their first strategy to obtain a supply teacher is to make direct contact with a familiar supply teacher (often directly recruited as described above). Around half the primary, special and nursery schools turn to agencies if their first contact is unsuccessful, as do almost 80%

of secondary schools. Where agencies and local authority supply services are used, over 70% of schools say they ask for a preferred teacher by name.

There are a number of statistically significant differences in the ways that schools obtain supply teachers. Some are less likely to obtain supply teachers through direct contact; this includes schools in urban areas, particularly London; schools that are larger; schools with lower attainment; and schools with high free school meals eligibility. Such schools are more likely to use private supply agencies and to use many different supply teachers, who are less familiar with the school. In contrast, smaller schools in rural areas or outside London; schools with high attainment; and schools with low free school meals eligibility are more likely to obtain supply teachers through direct contact, and to use familiar supply teachers. The most challenging schools are often charged more for supply teachers by agencies. Around 30% of teachers (more secondary than primary) had turned down work in particular schools, most often because of poor pupil behaviour and lack of support.

Secondary schools experience the greatest difficulty in obtaining supply teachers to teach practical subjects such as PE and technology, while primary schools reported a shortage of supply teachers willing to teach Year 6 and Foundation Stage classes. Special schools particularly noted the shortage of supply teachers with experience of severe learning difficulties.

Schools' evaluations of private supply agencies, local authority services and supply teachers

Schools consider that the most important factors in any agency or supply service are reliability of service and quality of teacher provided (each rated very important by more than 95% of respondents). The Quality Mark was rated as very important by 8% of respondents, and appearing on a Preferred Supplier List by 15%. The majority of schools rated the agencies or supply services they used as good or excellent in relation to efficiency of booking (90%), providing cover when needed (84%), and quality of teacher provided (73%).

Schools rated the supply teachers they use against a list of qualities. Overall mean ratings of 'excellent' or 'good' were given by the vast majority of nursery (94%), primary (87%) and special (84%) schools, and

by 67% of secondary schools. Less than 1% of schools gave an overall rating of 'poor'. The schools that were able to use directly contacted familiar teachers rated these as more effective than did the schools that used many unfamiliar teachers; this was statistically significant.

Deployment in schools

The vast majority of secondary schools (97%) expect supply teachers on short placements to supervise pupils doing set work, and 75% do not aim to achieve a subject match for short placements. On average secondary supply teachers spend only 40% of their time teaching subjects in which they have qualifications and experience. Primary schools usually expect supply teachers to follow the absent teacher's plans (74%). The qualitative data suggests that this difference contributes to the greater job satisfaction indicated by primary teachers.

Supporting supply teachers

The DfES guidance, *Using Supply Teachers to Cover Short-term Absences* (2002a), sets out very clearly what is good practice in relation to supporting supply teachers. Only 36% of secondary schools and 18% of primary schools indicated that they were familiar with this document. Schools considered supply teacher induction and the provision of a named individual to support and supervise supply teachers to be important in maximising the effectiveness of supply teachers. Most schools (81% primary and 93% secondary) reported that they provide supply teachers with a brief handbook of information. However, only 33% of primary and 68% of secondary supply teachers reported that they were 'almost always' or 'sometimes' given such a handbook. Those who had experienced this reported that such information was very useful. In the same way, far more schools reported that a named individual was responsible for supporting supply teachers than supply teachers reported having such support.

Professional development of supply teachers

The majority of agencies and LEAs offer some professional development for supply teachers, though several noted that many supply teachers are not enthusiastic about Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Over 40% of LEAs said that supply teachers had free access to the range of LEA-provided CPD; however, a fifth commented that the school or the supply teacher must pay. LEAs that

provide a supply service are more likely to offer CPD, and in some cases this was carefully designed to meet supply teachers' needs, which were identified using school feedback. LEA partnerships with private sector companies varied enormously in their provision: in some cases no provision for CPD had been made in the partnership agreement, and in other cases one partner or other was responsible. The best practice came where both partners had an equally strong commitment to the development of supply teachers. Private supply agencies offer a wide range of CPD, often linked to social events where supply teachers can meet each other. While there have been some imaginative attempts to improve provision, including accredited courses and internet courses, take-up is limited. Schools often include long-term and regular supply teachers in INSET days and twilight training, but many indicated that this is not their responsibility.

Overall, 34% of the teachers who had been in supply teaching throughout 2004 had experienced some CPD in that year, though this was in many cases limited to a single twilight session. There were statistically significant differences between groups of teachers in CPD experience. The overseas-trained teachers (49%) were the most likely to have had CPD, while those in their sixties (23%) and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (25%) were the least likely. Primary supply teachers were more likely than secondary to have undertaken any CPD (39%, 27%). Qualitative data indicate that the main reasons for not engaging in CPD related to loss of pay (if held during the day) or to inappropriate timing (if held in the evening); the latter was the view of those doing supply because it offers flexibility and allows them to prioritise child-care. Those approaching retirement simply felt that they were too old. But a substantial group indicated that they had never been offered any CPD.

Of those that had experienced CPD, 17% had attended ICT training (most often provided by a school); 13% had attended behaviour management courses (most often provided by an agency); and 17% had attended school INSET days. Fifty percent of the supply teachers identified areas in which they would like CPD in the year ahead: the most frequently mentioned areas were ICT (listed by 30% of this group), and behaviour management (22%). These were areas in which schools had also given lower ratings to their supply teachers.

A quarter of the supply teachers were aware of the DfES self-study materials for teachers (DfES, 2002b); 9% had used them; and the majority of these had found them useful. Most agency and LEA interviewees were aware of them and promoted them; however, very few schools (4%) said they were familiar with the materials, and only 1% had recommended them to supply teachers.

Supply teachers' characteristics

Drawing on data provided by schools, it is estimated that there are over 40,000 teachers who do supply teaching at some point in a year. The proportions of men and women are similar to the proportions nationally (71% female). However, there are some statistically significant differences between supply teachers and regular teachers, and between various groups of supply teachers. In comparison with regular classroom teachers, supply teachers are older (50% aged 50 and over, compared with 26% of classroom teachers, DfES, 2005). Those in Inner London are younger than those elsewhere. In comparison with teachers nationally, the supply teacher sample included a higher proportion of teachers without QTS and not on a route to QTS (7.8% compared to 2.8% nationally). This included both overseas-trained teachers (5.4%) and those with no teaching qualification related to school (2.4%). Both groups were found in secondary schools more than primary, and a third of the overseas-trained teachers worked in London. The supply teacher sample also included a higher proportion of NQTs than nationally (8.1% compared with 3.9%); these were older than NQTs nationally. Of supply teachers working in primary schools, 12% had qualified to teach in secondary or post-sixteen.

Supply teachers' patterns of work

Of the supply teachers in the sample, 56% said their main way of obtaining work was directly from schools, 31% through private supply agencies, and 9% through local authority supply services. Several groups made more use of agencies: secondary teachers, those working in inner city neighbourhoods, NQTs, overseas-trained teachers and those with no teaching qualification relating to schools. One fifth of those working through agencies were influenced by whether the agency had the Quality Mark, but availability of work and helpfulness and reliability were seen as more important factors.

The supply teachers in the sample worked an average of 2.9 days a week; this was higher for those working

through private supply agencies, secondary teachers, overseas-trained teachers and those in London. The number of days worked per week decreased with age (those in their twenties worked 4 days a week, and those in their sixties, 2.2 days). Primary supply teachers worked longer hours than secondary, and were more likely to work at home in the evenings. All these differences were statistically significant. On average, supply teachers had worked in six different schools in the last year; however, a quarter of the sample had worked in only one school (often one where they had previously been employed). Those who worked through agencies and the younger teachers worked in more different schools. Most placements lasted less than a week.

Pay and pension arrangements

Average daily pay for those working through private supply agencies (at a 'market rate') was £114 outside London and £119 in London, and for those working through local authorities or directly for schools, £132 outside London and £140 in London. The teachers in their twenties earned more working through private supply agencies than through local authorities or directly for schools, whereas all other age groups earned less through agencies than through other channels of work. Schools paid more than this to employ supply teachers; agencies generally charged about £40 mark-up (though less where the LEA had a partnership arrangement); LEAs often charged a smaller booking fee and/or an annual charge to buy into the service.

Only 45% of respondents aged under 60 stated that they paid into any pension fund, and only 13% of those in their twenties. Around 40% of those aged under 60 who were eligible to pay into the Teachers Pension Fund said that they did not do so.

Career patterns, motivation, and aspirations for the future

The supply teachers in the sample have had varied careers, often including periods of fixed-term and part-time teaching, and employment outside teaching. On average they have been in permanent full-time teaching posts for less than half their years of employment. A third of the sample were retired or approaching retirement. A quarter combined supply teaching with another occupation, most often childcare. Eight per cent had qualified since 2000 and had not been able to obtain

permanent teaching posts. Eight per cent of the sample were overseas trained teachers.

The motivations for supply teaching reflected these career patterns: 32% were supply teaching because it fits with childcare and family commitments; 26% to supplement their pensions; 22% because they could not obtain permanent full or part-time posts. Sixty-one percent of respondents were attracted by the lower workload. Some also identified positive aspects of supply teaching such as variety, flexibility, a focus on teaching and learning, and less stress than regular teaching.

Fourteen percent of supply teachers would prefer to be in permanent full-time teaching posts, and 17% in part-time permanent posts. For the remainder (excluding those who are retired), the main factors that might encourage them to join or return to the permanent sector were a reduction in workload (70% primary, 60% secondary) and better behaviour management in schools (43% primary, 74% secondary). Greater availability of part-time or job-share posts was seen as a major incentive by those who combine supply teaching with another occupation, and by a statistically significantly higher proportion of primary teachers (46%) than secondary (30%). Those teaching secondary shortage subjects were no more likely than other groups to anticipate moving into permanent posts.

Job satisfaction

Overall, supply teachers indicated a high level of satisfaction with their work. More than three-quarters indicated that they were very or fairly satisfied with the schools and classes they were placed in; their workload; hours of work and conditions of employment; the degree of choice they had about when they worked; and the amount of work they were offered. The lowest levels of satisfaction were with opportunities to develop relationships with other teachers, and pupil behaviour. Overall satisfaction increased with age. Women indicated higher levels of satisfaction than men, and primary supply teachers indicated higher satisfaction than secondary, especially in the 30-59 age group; these differences were statistically significant. The latter was the case even when gender was controlled for. Supply teachers had some concerns about the status accorded to them by pupils and teachers in some schools, especially when on short-term placements.

Emerging themes: good practice

Clear descriptions of good practice are set out in the standards for the Quality Mark (DfES, 2004) and in the DfES guidance (2002a). While LEA, school and supply teacher respondents were not all aware of or familiar with these documents, the accounts of what constituted good (or less good) practice given by all respondents were largely in accord with those of the Quality Mark standards and the guidance for schools.

Overall, much good practice was evident. Agency practices were, with few exceptions, good, and appeared to be very much better than research conducted a few years ago (e.g. Grimshaw *et al.*, 2004; Hutchings, 2004) has indicated. Agencies argued that in the current competitive market they need to operate with good practice in order to survive. While some LEA arrangements (including private sector partnerships) were models of good practice, the quality was variable, and some make little or no provision. Where schools recruited and employed supply teachers directly, it was difficult to assess how far appropriate procedures were being employed, for example in relation to checks and quality. Comparisons between the different forms of employment / deployment are generally inappropriate because they are catering for different school markets and using different groups of supply teachers.

In relation to employment and deployment to schools, the main issues of concern among supply teachers and schools were:

- Pay and pensions: the process for threshold assessment is not entirely appropriate in relation to the working patterns of supply teachers. Fifty-five percent of supply teachers aged under 60 are not paying into any pension fund.
- Challenging schools: such schools use more supply teachers, often have to pay them more, but also often receive less well qualified and experienced teachers, and teachers who they rated as less effective than did respondents in less challenging schools. The operation of a market (which includes agencies, LEAs and all schools and supply teachers) militates against such schools obtaining high quality supply teachers.

- Professional development: 66% of supply teachers had experienced no professional development activity in the last year.

Many schools were operating in line with the DfES guidance on using supply teachers, but some were not. Some supply teachers could have contributed more effectively to teaching and learning if they had been better informed and supported by the schools. The main issues of concern in relation to the use of supply teachers in schools that arise from the data collected are:

- lack of familiarity of schools with the DfES guidance;
- limited provision of information hand-outs, adequate information about pupils, and in some cases, resources;
- varied expectations of supply teachers that were not always made explicit.

It remains to be seen whether support staff and cover supervisors can provide cover effectively in all schools; it is a concern that a minority of schools were using support staff who they said were not appropriately skilled and trained to provide cover, and indicated that they were doing this as a cost-cutting measure.

Many schools intend to continue using supply teachers to provide short-term cover in the foreseeable future, and most expect to use them to cover long-term absences. Many supply teachers would prefer to continue in this role. It therefore seems crucial to continue to work to support this part of the workforce by addressing the issues identified above, so that supply teachers can make an effective contribution to teaching and learning.

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Email: james.rushbrooke@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

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