

---

## THE DEPLOYMENT AND IMPACT OF SUPPORT STAFF IN SCHOOL

### REPORT ON FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY OF SCHOOLS, SUPPORT STAFF AND TEACHERS (STRAND 1, WAVE 1, 2004)

---

*Peter Blatchford, Paul Basset, Penelope Brown, Clare Martin, Anthony Russell, Rob Webster and Naomi Haywood*  
*Institute of Education, University of London*

#### Background

This Research Brief reports on results from a large scale study of the characteristics and deployment of support staff in special, secondary and primary schools in England and Wales. This report covers results from the first survey conducted in 2004. It involved a large scale national postal survey comprising questionnaires to schools, support staff themselves and also teachers. It is the largest study of support staff yet undertaken. It was commissioned by the DfES and the Welsh Assembly Government.

#### Key Findings

- Support staff were best classified in terms of seven groups: TA Equivalent (TA, LSA [SEN pupils], nursery nurse, therapist); Pupil Welfare (Connexions personal advisor, education welfare officer, home-school liaison officer, learning mentor, nurse and welfare assistant); Technical and Specialist (ICT network manager, ICT technician, librarian, science technician and technology technician); Other Pupil Support (bilingual support officer, cover supervisor, escort, exam invigilator, language assistant, midday assistant and midday supervisor); Facilities (cleaner, cook, and other catering staff); Administrative (administrator/clerk, bursar, finance officer, office manager, secretary, attendance officer, data manager, examination officer, and PA to the headteacher); and Site (caretaker and premises manager).
- 16% of schools had 10 or less support staff, 30% had 11-20 support staff, 37% had 21-40, 11% had 41-60, and 6% had 61 or more staff. After controlling for the number of pupils in schools there were more support staff in special schools. TA equivalent support staff formed the largest grouping, particularly in special schools, followed by 'other pupil support' staff and administrative staff. Across the seven support staff categories, site staff were the least frequent category. Across all schools they were most likely not to have any pupil welfare and facilities staff, and technical and specialist staff.
- 'Other pupil support' staff presented the greatest recruitment and retention challenge for schools. Schools in areas with higher need had more recruitment and turnover problems, and more vacancies.
- 71% of schools had a change in the number of support staff since January 2003 (to the time of the survey in 2004), the most common reason being a change in the number of children with Special Educational Needs.

- Most support staff were female and there were more female support staff in primary than special and secondary schools. Only site staff were more likely to be male than female. Most respondents were aged 36 and over. There was a fairly even balance between those who had qualifications at GCSE level or lower and those who had qualifications above GCSE. Site staff along with other pupil support staff and especially facilities staff had the lowest qualifications. Pupil welfare staff and technicians had the highest level of qualifications.
- Half of the support staff surveyed worked more hours than specified in their contract and nearly two thirds worked more hours than specified at least once a week.
- 88% of support staff said that they had a job description, nearly half stated that their work was supervised by a teacher, and about half of support staff had been appraised in the last year. All three practices were more likely to occur in special schools.
- Wages overall were higher on average in secondary schools and lower in primary schools. The highest average wages were paid to pupil welfare staff, technicians and administrative staff, while the lowest wages were paid to facilities and site staff. Staff qualified above GCSE level were paid higher wages than those who were qualified to GCSE level or below, but this relationship between qualifications and wage did not hold for TA equivalent, facilities and site staff. Female staff on average had lower wages than their male counterparts for the welfare, technical staff and administrative staff categories, but there was no difference for the other categories.
- Most teachers said that at the time of survey (2004) they did not have allocated planning or feedback time with support staff they worked with in the classroom (75% and 81% for planning and feedback time respectively). There was noticeably less planning and feedback time in secondary schools and most in special schools.
- The majority of teachers (77%) had no training to help them work with support staff in classrooms, though 40% were involved in training support staff.
- Support staff were positive when asked to indicate their level of job satisfaction (86% were satisfied) and how much they felt appreciated by schools (72% felt appreciated). TA equivalent and 'other pupil support' staff were the most satisfied with their posts, and facilities staff and technicians were the least satisfied. 'Other pupil support' staff were also most likely to feel appreciated by their schools, and technicians and administrative staff the least likely.
- Teachers reported that support staff had a positive effect on their level of job satisfaction and reducing levels of stress (57% and 56% respectively). TA equivalent staff and the technicians had most effect on both outcomes. Results on reductions in work loads were still positive though less pronounced (46% of teachers said there had been a reduction). Administrative staff and especially technicians had had most effect on decreasing workloads. Most teachers also felt that support staff had a beneficial effect on pupil learning and behaviour, and on their teaching.

## Introduction

A number of developments have contributed to the growth in the range and number of support staff in schools. Recently there has been a large investment in increasing levels of support staff. Most recently, *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: a National Agreement* (the National Agreement) signed in January 2003 between the DfES, the Welsh Assembly Government, local authority employers and the majority of school workforce unions represented a consensus on principles relating to tackling teacher workload, developing support staff roles, and raising standards in schools. Information from the DfES shows that, for the period January 1997 to January 2003, there was a 65% increase in all support staff in English schools.

Though there has been a dramatic increase in support staff in schools, there are currently significant gaps in knowledge about many aspects, such as their levels of training and qualifications, their recruitment and retention, and their deployment in schools. This project was designed to fill these gaps. It had two main aims:

- a. to provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of

support staff in school, their characteristics and deployment in schools, and how these change over time.

- b. to analyse the impact of support staff on teaching and learning and management and administration in schools, and how this changes over time.

The project was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a five year project and has two main strands. Strand 1 addresses the first aim and involves a large scale national postal survey of schools, support staff and teachers, to be repeated at two yearly intervals. This report covers results from the first survey conducted in 2004. Taken together, the three survey points will provide a systematic account of basic information on support staff in schools and changes over a key 5 year period (2003-8). Strand 2 addresses the second aim and is a multi method approach that addresses the impact of support staff and processes within schools affecting impact. It will be conducted at two time points - 2005/6 and 2007/8.

The information provided by the Strand 1 surveys, discussed in this Brief, are the basis for a classification of support staff and an analysis of differences between sectors (primary, secondary and special), types of support staff, geographical areas and school characteristics (e.g., size, type, levels of need).

## **Methodology for Strand 1**

### **Main School Questionnaire (MSQ).**

This collected basic information on support staff in schools, such as numbers of support staff; ease of recruitment; vacancies; problems with turnover and recruitment; changes in support staff since January 2003; and reasons for changes in numbers of support staff. Based on experiences with a pilot survey and previous research, in order to achieve a 10% sample of the population, questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 10,000 schools (approximately 40% of the total schools in England and Wales). In order to obtain sufficient information on special and secondary schools and schools in Wales, a slightly higher proportion of these schools were included in the sample. A representative sample of 2,318 were returned, a response rate of 23% - similar to that predicted from pilot work. This consisted of 1534 primary

schools (response rate 25%), 504 secondary schools (response rate 18%) and 279 special schools (response rate 27%).

### **Support Staff Questionnaire (SSQ)**

The aim of the SSQ was to collect information from support staff, including their general characteristics, contracts, qualifications, training, working practices, tasks undertaken, and opinions on their role. This questionnaire was sent to specific post titles within each school, as identified by responses to the MSQ. This strategy was adopted in order to obtain responses from a wide range of support staff. Within each post title, schools receiving questionnaires were selected at random. The questionnaire was sent to a sample of 5,201 support staff, and of these, 2,127 were returned, a response rate of 41%.

### **Teacher Questionnaire (TQ)**

The Teacher Questionnaire included information on allocated time with support staff; training; and views on the impact of support staff on pupils and themselves. Questionnaires were sent to four teachers in each school who responded to the MSQ. For primary schools, two questionnaires were sent to teachers from each key stage. For secondary schools, questionnaires were sent to two core subject teachers and two non-core subject teachers. For special schools, questionnaires were sent to any four teachers. Questionnaires were sent to 9,272 teachers and 1,824 were returned, a response rate of 20%.

## **Presentation of Results**

Subsequent sections of the research brief note a number of important effects based on analysis of the data. Statistical techniques used included multi-level regression modelling. All results presented were statistically significant.

### **Classification of support staff**

A broad range of support staff roles have evolved over recent years in schools. Previous attempts to classify these roles have tended to restrict themselves to adults working in support of children and learning, and do not include some categories of support staff, such as administrators and site staff. Groupings have often been based on common sense assumptions about which post titles should be put together rather than testing the categorisation between support staff roles in a formal way. It is important to do this because then one can be clearer about any differences found in deployment and impact.

The classification of support staff went beyond previous approaches in that it was based on multivariate statistical analysis which classified post titles in groups in terms of the degree of commonality in the tasks they performed. In the SSQ, respondents were given a list of 91 tasks and asked to tick which of the tasks they carried out in their posts. The responses were classified into groups using the statistical method of 'cluster analysis'. It was found that support staff in England and Wales were best classified in terms of seven groups.

1. TA Equivalent (TA, LSA (SEN pupils), nursery nurse, therapist)
2. Pupil Welfare (Connexions personal advisor, education welfare officer, home-school liaison officer, learning mentor, nurse and welfare assistant)
3. Technical and Specialist Staff (ICT network manager, ICT technician, librarian, science technician and technology technician)
4. Other Pupil Support (bilingual support officer, cover supervisor, escort, exam invigilator, language assistant, midday assistant and midday supervisor)
5. Facilities Staff (cleaner, cook, and other catering staff)
6. Administrative Staff (administrator/clerk, bursar, finance officer, office manager, secretary, attendance officer, data manager, examination officer, and PA to the headteacher)
7. Site Staff (caretaker and premises manager).

In several cases it was found that previous groupings of support staff post titles were not sustainable once the activities actually undertaken were considered. The significance of the DISS classification, aside from being based on *all* support staff roles, is also that it accounts for the remodelling and restructuring that has taken place among the workforce immediately following the introduction of the implementation of the National Agreement in September 2003.

#### **Number of support staff in schools**

The results showed that 16% of schools had 10 or less support staff, 30% had 11-20 support staff, 37% had 21-40, 11% had 41-60, and 6% had 61 or more staff. In about a quarter of all schools (23%) there were 5 or less full time equivalent support staff (FTE), and a similar percentage (26%) had

between 5 and 10 full-time FTE. At the other extreme, 23% of schools had more than 20 FTE. There were far more support staff in secondary schools and they had higher support staff FTE, but controlling for other variables, particularly numbers of pupils in schools, showed that special schools had the largest numbers of support staff in each category. This no doubt reflects the greater levels of need in these schools, and higher levels of funding. TA equivalent support staff formed the largest grouping, particularly in special schools. Other pupil support staff were the next most prevalent category followed by administrative staff. Across the seven support staff categories, site staff were the least numerous category in individual schools, and across all schools they were less likely to have any pupil welfare and facilities staff, and technicians.

#### **Increased numbers of support staff**

The MSQ results indicated that 71% of schools had a change in their number of support staff between 2003 and 2004, and the most common reason for this, given by 46% of schools, was change in the number of children with SEN. In the vast majority of cases, this had led to an increase in the number of support staff. The second most common reason, given by 37% of schools, was new school-led initiatives, and virtually all of these schools indicated that this had led to an increase in the number of support staff. This is an area that will be pursued in future surveys in Strand 1 and in case studies in Strand 2, as it may generate new knowledge and ideas relating to innovative approaches to tackling workload and implementing the National Agreement. The third most common reason for the change in support staff numbers was a change in the school budget, a response given by 33% of schools. Of the schools giving this response, 53% said it had led to an increase, while 47% said it had led to a decrease, in support staff numbers.

#### **Who are the support staff?**

The findings from Strand 1 extend results from other studies which have mostly just focussed on classroom-based learning support roles. Most support staff were female, and there were more female support staff in primary than special and secondary schools. Most support staff were aged 36 and over, and almost all classified themselves as of white ethnic background. Only site staff were more likely to be male, though there were relatively high numbers of male technicians. Site staff, along with 'other pupil support' and especially facilities staff, had the lowest qualifications, while pupil welfare staff and technicians had the highest level of qualifications. We found that

14% of all support staff had more than one role in the school.

### **Contracts and working arrangements of support staff**

Contracted hours were lower in primary schools (18.7 hours on average) than in secondary (26.6 hours) and special schools (26 hours). About a quarter of support staff worked full-time. Most support staff said that they were on permanent rather than temporary contracts (87% vs. 13%). Staff in the pupil welfare category were least likely to have a permanent contract (77%). Staff in categories associated with less pupil contact appeared to be most likely to have a permanent contract, that is, facilities staff, administrative staff and site staff (96%, 97% and 95%).

Though previous studies have identified problems that can arise when few support staff have clearly defined roles, we found that 88% of support staff said that they had a job description (though the survey data do not allow us to say how adequate these descriptions might be). Nearly half of respondents stated that their work was supervised by a teacher. Even though HMI (2002) have called for schools to develop appraisal systems, we found that about half the support staff had been appraised in the last year. There were school type differences. Staff in special schools were more likely to have a job description, more likely to have their work supervised by a teacher, and more likely to have been appraised in the last year. On the other hand, staff in secondary schools were less likely to have a job description and less likely to be supervised by a teacher. In future surveys in the DISS project it will be possible to see whether the extent of supervision and appraisal arrangements has increased.

Much of the existing evidence concerning support staff working extra hours outside their contract is anecdotal but the DISS project is unique in providing systematic data on the frequency of additional hours worked by all types of support staff. Half of support staff worked more hours than specified in their contract and nearly two thirds of these worked more hours than specified at least once a week. About half of these were not paid for this additional time. Site staff and administrative staff were likely to work most hours beyond those specified in their contracts, while other pupil support staff worked least extra hours. The staff most likely to be paid for extra time

were facilities and site staff. The staff least likely to be paid were pupil welfare staff, technicians and TA equivalent staff.

### **Factors influencing the wages, recruitment, vacancies and retention of support staff**

Historically, pay and conditions have been decided by schools within a framework set by the Local Authority (LA). This has led to much variation, as the data from the survey reveals. There is little existing data on pay for all support staff, and the breakdown of wages in terms of each support staff category is helpful. Wages were about £1.50 per hour higher on average in secondary schools than primary schools. This no doubt reflects the fact that more senior specialist posts are more likely in these larger schools or where more specialist posts are needed. The highest average salaries were paid to pupil welfare staff, technicians and administrative staff, while the lowest salaries were paid to facilities and site staff. Higher salaries (at the time of the survey, over £15 per hour) were paid to pupil welfare staff, technicians, other pupil support staff, and particularly administrative staff. These support staff groups had a wider range of staff, paid at different levels. This suggests that a career structure with possibilities for promotion and higher salaries are more possible in these posts while facilities and site staff are more constrained in salaries they can earn.

The DISS project also examined in a systematic way factors that influence wages. There were some differences between school types. TA equivalent and welfare staff had highest wages in special schools, whilst technicians in secondary schools had higher salaries than those in primary and special schools. We know that there are far more technicians in secondary schools and this last result may reflect the fact that career progression for technicians is more likely in secondary schools, and there is more possibility for senior and better paid roles. School type did not influence the wages of the other categories of support staff.

Several other results probably also reflect the greater likelihood of career progression in some support staff categories and the way that differences in wages are influenced by factors such as qualifications, gender and age. We found that staff qualified above GCSE level were paid higher wages than those who were qualified to GCSE level or below. But it was noticeable that this relation between qualifications and wage did not hold for TA equivalent, facilities and site staff. Female staff had lower wages than their male counterparts for the welfare,

technicians and administrative staff categories, but there was no difference between males and females for the other categories. This also probably reflects the fact that career progression and higher wages are more possible in these groups and males appear more likely to reach senior positions. Age was significant in influencing the wages of welfare, technicians and administrative staff, with older staff paid more than younger staff. Once again, these support staff groups seem to have more opportunities for career progression and seniority and higher wages are more likely to be achieved with age. Further examination of the data showed, for the pupil welfare category and technicians, that males had the highest paid positions, and this could explain the difference between men and women in these support staff categories.

The Strand 1 MSQ results show that there were more vacancies and increased problems of recruitment and turnover for schools with a higher percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils from ethnic minority groups, and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). These reflect the social context of the schools and the linguistic and educational characteristics of potential support staff, and these will in turn affect the availability of suitable support staff and possibly their willingness to apply for posts. The most frequent response to the open-ended questions on problems of recruitment highlighted the lack of applicants with expertise or skills and experience as the main hindrance to recruitment. These findings lend support to reasons why schools in some areas experience recruitment difficulties. It will be possible to further explore these findings, and possible explanations, in the case studies conducted in Strand 2 and also in future questionnaire surveys in the DISS project.

Wider data on support staff vacancies are hard to come by - the DfES only publish vacancy statistics for teaching staff - and so the DISS MSQ results are valuable. They revealed that about a quarter of schools had vacancies for support staff post titles. Most recruitment problems were found for 'other pupil support' staff, particularly in secondary schools, followed by TA equivalent staff. There were least vacancies for site staff. It was noticeable that 'other pupil support' staff presented the most challenging problems in terms of vacancies and turnover. This category of support staff includes mid day supervisors and seems to

reflect recruitment difficulties attached to this role, connected to hours and pay. Problems were most marked for secondary schools. The most frequent response to an open-ended question about turnover referred to the tendency of staff to look for promotion, career development and salary progression elsewhere as the chief cause of turnover.

#### **Training and qualifications of support staff**

Previous research has found that training for support staff can be patchy and incidental. We found that two-thirds of support staff had attended school-based INSET within the last two years. Previous research is less clear about attendance rates for non-school-based INSET. We found that half of the support staff had attended non-school based INSET or other education and training relevant to their post. Only a third had attended education or training leading to a qualification in the previous two years. In the analysis of DISS open ended answers we found, where training was mentioned as an issue, that a negative view about training outweighed a positive view. The overall impression gained was that at this point in time schools may provide or support training, but support staff felt this did not necessarily lead to increased pay or promotion. It will be important to follow up these perceptions at later points, as the National Agreement is implemented in schools.

#### **The nature of support staff roles: supporting teachers and pupils**

Once again, there is little quantitative data available on the amount of time support staff spend supporting pupils and teachers. The DISS project is the first to provide substantial data relating to this issue across a broad population of support staff. We obtained a numerical estimate of the amount of support offered to teachers and separated this from the amount offered to pupils. A third of support staff spent all their working time directly supporting pupils (38%) and 1 in 10 spent all their time directly supporting teachers (11%). A third (32%) of respondents spent no time supporting pupils, and slightly more (40%) no time supporting teachers. As expected, this picture varied between categories of support staff. 'Other pupil support' and TA equivalent support staff spent much more time than the other support staff groups directly supporting pupils all or most of the time. Conversely, facilities, administrative and site staff spent very little time directly supporting pupils. TA equivalent staff were also most likely to directly support teachers (29% all or most of the time) but now they were closely followed by technicians (26% all or most of the time). Technicians along with

administrative staff were the only categories of support staff that spent noticeably more time supporting teachers than pupils. More support staff in special schools spend all or most of their time supporting pupils (69%) compared to primary schools (61%) and especially secondary schools (40%). This is to some extent likely to reflect the higher number of classroom based staff in special schools, though it is also likely to reflect the greater support needed by pupils in special schools. Secondary school support staff were less likely to support pupils, when compared with their counterparts at primary level. These data rely on support staff making relatively general judgments about time supporting teachers and pupils and in Strand 2 of the DISS project more accurate precise estimates will be made from time logs and observations.

#### **Allocated planning or feedback time**

The data showed that most teachers do not have allocated planning or feedback time with support staff they work with in the classroom (75% and 81% for planning and feedback time respectively). This is in line with most other studies and all point to this as a factor undermining good practice. There was noticeably less planning and feedback time in secondary schools and most in special schools. Moreover, the majority of teachers (77%) had not had training to help them work with support staff in classrooms (even though 40% said that they were involved in training support staff themselves). It seems that at the time of the survey much still needed to be done in terms of preparing teachers for working with support staff.

#### **The views of support staff on their role**

In the SSQ we asked support staff to indicate their level of job satisfaction and how much they felt appreciated by schools. Responses showed that many get a great deal of satisfaction from the work they do in schools; 86% were satisfied with their jobs, and 72% felt appreciated by their school. TA equivalent and 'other pupil support' staff were the most satisfied with their posts, and facilities staff and technicians the least satisfied. 'Other pupil support' staff were also most likely to feel appreciated by their schools, and technicians and administrative staff the least likely. Technicians were therefore found to be both more dissatisfied and less appreciated.

Responses to an open-ended question from the SSQ showed that nearly half of all responses were on

the theme of their roles, tasks and responsibilities, and most were just descriptive, expanding on information given in answer to other questions (37% of all responses). Most other responses on this theme were in some way negative about their roles, tasks and responsibilities, and of these the most common concern (5% of all responses) was how their workload had become increasingly heavy. Another 12% of support staff were on the theme of pay and conditions, the most common view being that pay does not match responsibilities (5% of all responses).

Although the quantitative and qualitative results appeared to differ, with the former more positive, they are not necessarily contradictory. It may be, for example, that someone gives a predominantly positive general judgment about job satisfaction, and being valued by the school, and yet they also have some particular concerns they wish to voice.

#### **Impact of support staff on teachers and pupils**

From the teachers' perspective, support staff had a positive effect on their level of job satisfaction. Over half of them (57%) said that there had been a large or slight increase in satisfaction. As expected, those support staff who worked more closely in the classroom seemed to have the most effect - especially TA equivalent, followed by technicians - and those with responsibilities out of the classroom like facilities and site staff least. There was a similar positive view about the effect that support staff had in reducing levels of stress. Over half of teachers (56%) said that support staff had led to a slight or large decrease in stress. Again support staff with a more direct role in the classroom had most effect.

The implementation of the National Agreement is recent, and very few studies exist on effects of support staff on teacher workloads. We found that just under half of teachers (46%) said that support staff had led to a reduction in their workload. Previous research has concentrated only on TAs, but the DISS project is able to give a more representative picture of all support staff. Administrative staff and technicians had had most impact, with technicians most likely to have brought about a large decrease. As might be expected, given that they work less directly with teachers, facilities, site, and 'other pupil support' staff had less effect on workloads. Technicians were therefore consistently cited by teachers as being responsible for positive effects on teacher workload, job satisfaction and levels of stress. Another conclusion is that administrative staff may not work in situations where they directly impact on teachers but

they can help reduce teacher workloads.

Teachers were clear about the positive effect of support staff on pupil learning and behaviour. This was seen in various ways, including providing specialist skills, positively affecting pupils' confidence and motivation, and assisting in behaviour and discipline. It will be possible in Strand 2 of the DISS project to provide a more systematic analysis of the effect of support staff on pupil outcomes, than has been conducted in previous research. The DISS project findings also revealed that teachers felt that support staff had benefited their teaching. In order of frequency this was through: enabling teachers to concentrate on teaching and working with pupils, providing expertise, helping teachers improve the quality of their own teaching, freeing teachers from routine tasks, and allowing teachers to differentiate work for pupils.

### **The Future of the DISS Project**

This Research Brief summarises findings from the 2004 survey and comprises results from three questionnaires - from schools, support staff and teachers. It provides a description of the characteristics and deployment of support staff, their views and attitudes, and data on the impact of support staff on teachers and their workload. Importantly, it provides a solid baseline, against which further waves and modes of research will be measured.

The case studies and systematic observations in Strand 2 will provide more systematic detail on the deployment and impact of support staff, and their role in teaching and learning.

Over the lifetime of this project there will be significant changes as schools meet policy initiatives that necessitate innovative solutions, remodel roles, and respond to external factors affecting the labour market. The DISS project will take regular snapshots of this situation and provide up-to-date, and in some cases, brand new data on support staff and the impact they have in schools, in classrooms, and on teachers and pupils.

### **Additional information**

*Copies of the full report (RR776) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

*Cheques should be made payable to 'DfES Priced Publications'.*

*Copies of this Research Brief (RB776) are available free of charge from the above address (tel. 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/)*

*Further information about this research can be obtained from Gill Redfearn, 6C, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith St, SW1P 3BT.*

*Email: [gill.redfearn@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:gill.redfearn@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)*

*The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills.*