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# Research into the deployment of primary school support staff in Wales

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Research into the deployment of primary school support staff in Wales.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

### Glossary text

<b>Acronym/Key word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	Provision for pupils with a learning problem or disability that makes it more difficult for them to learn compared to most children their age.
Central South Consortium (CSC)	The regional school effectiveness and improvement service for the counties of Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan.
Educational Achievement Service (EAS)	The regional school effectiveness and improvement service for the counties of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen.
Education Workforce Council (EWC)	The independent regulator in Wales for teachers in maintained schools, Further Education teachers and learning support staff in both school and FE settings, as well as Youth Workers and people involved in work-based learning.
Emotional Literacy	The ability to understand and express feelings.
Education Through Regional Working (ERW)	The regional school effectiveness and improvement service for the counties of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea.
Estyn	The education and training inspectorate for Wales which provides independent inspection and advice on the quality and standards of education and training provided in Wales.
Foundation Phase	The statutory curriculum for all 3-7year olds in Wales.
GwE	The regional school effectiveness and improvement service for the counties of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham.
Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA)	School support staff with the highest levels of responsibility including being able to teach classes on their own, cover

	planned absences and allow teachers to have time to plan and mark.
Learning Support Worker (LSW)	Overarching term for teaching support staff, teaching assistants and education support staff. Used in different contexts across Wales.
Preparation, Planning and Assessment (PPA)	Time set aside for teachers during their timetabled teaching day to allow them to carry out planning, preparation and assessment activities.
Professional Learning	Opportunities for educational professionals to improve their knowledge, skills and practice.
Pupil Development Grant (PDG)	Grants made to schools in Wales to provide financial support to help tackle the effects of poverty on educational attainment – formerly Pupil Deprivation Grant
Regional Education Consortia	The regional school effectiveness and improvement services in Wales: Central South Consortium, EAS, ERW and GwE.
Support Staff	A variety of school staff members who provide specialized instructional and other support for pupils.
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)	A national organisation which represents the interests and views of local government in Wales.

## 1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 In February 2018, Cardiff Metropolitan University were appointed by the Welsh Government to undertake research into the deployment of classroom based Learning Support Workers in schools across Wales.
- 1.2 The aims of the research commissioned by the Welsh Government on which this report is based, were to identify.
- The roles and responsibilities that classroom-based Learning Support Workers (henceforth 'support staff') in primary schools in Wales are being asked to deliver (**deployment**).
  - What professional learning is in place for support staff (**professional learning**).
  - How school leaders and teachers ensure that support staff are deployed effectively (**impact**).
  - Effective practice in these areas and how this could be promoted throughout the Welsh education system (**effective practice**).
- 1.3 At the time of writing there are over 500,000 teacher support staff in the UK education system with approximately 31,000 of these being registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) in Wales and approximately 18,000 of these working in primary schools in Wales where they are now a larger section of the workforce than teaching staff (Department for Education, 2018; Education Workforce Council, 2017).
- 1.4 This growth in the number of support staff within the Welsh and UK education system first began with an agreement arrived at in 2003 between the UK Government, local authorities and the teaching associations to reduce teacher workload. This allowed for teachers having guaranteed preparation and planning (PPA) time that was to be protected through more support staff being employed in schools (The Teacher Workload Agreement).
- 1.5 In Wales, the next surge in the number of support staff resulted from the gradual introduction after 2004 of the Foundation Phase curriculum for 3 to 7 year-olds which required higher pupil-adult ratios particularly in nursery and reception classes

with most of the additional adults being support staff (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003 and 2008a).

- 1.6 The commitment of the Welsh Government to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment led first in 2006 to the allocation of additional funding to schools through the RAISE programme (Holtom, 2017) and since 2010, the Pupil Deprivation Grant (now Pupil Development Grant) (Welsh Government 2013a). Although the use of these grants was not necessarily intended to support the appointment of additional staff to schools, as the evaluation reports of both of these initiatives identify, it has led to a significant further growth in the number of support staff.
- 1.7 This piecemeal and rapid development of the support staff workforce has led to both benefits and challenges for the education system in Wales as is highlighted in this report. An example of this is the proliferation which has taken place in the number of job designations and titles with the Education Workforce Council discovering, when it began to register these staff from 2016, the existence of over 3,000 different job titles.
- 1.8 The guidance established by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services in 2003 allows schools to employ teaching assistants staff at the following levels and with the indicated responsibilities (National Joint Council, 2003, Welsh Government, 2011):

**Table 1- Teaching Assistant Responsibilities**

Levels	Roles
Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTAs) who have met the national requirements for HLTA.	Undertaking a wide variety of roles according to the needs, type and age-phase of the school. In all cases having at least one specific area of expertise in the development of learning and well-being of pupils; working with individuals, small groups and whole classes to lead learning and teaching a whole class without a teacher being present.
Grade 4 Teaching Assistant	To complement the professional work of teachers by taking responsibility for agreed learning activities under an agreed system of supervision. This may involve planning, preparing and delivering learning activities for individuals/groups or short term for whole classes and monitoring pupils and assessing, recording and reporting on pupils' achievement, progress and development. Responsible for the management and development of a specialist areas within the school and/or management of other teaching assistants including allocation and monitoring of work, appraisal and training.
Grade 3	Working under the guidance of teaching/senior staff and within an agreed system of supervision, to implement agreed work programmes with individuals/groups, in or out of the classroom. This could include those requiring detailed and specialist knowledge in particular areas and will involve assisting the teacher in the whole planning cycle and the management/preparation of resources. Staff may also supervise classes occasionally during the short-term absence of teachers. The primary focus will be to maintain good order and to keep pupils on task. Cover Supervisors will need to respond to questions and generally assist pupils to undertake set activities.
Grade 2	Working under the instruction/guidance of teaching/senior staff to undertake work/care/support programmes, to enable access to learning for pupils and to assist the teacher in the management of pupils and the classroom. Work may be carried out in the classroom or outside the main teaching area.
Grade 1	Working under the direct instruction of teaching/senior staff, usually in the classroom with the teacher, to support access to learning for pupils and to provide general support to the teacher in the management of pupils and the classroom.

## **The Research Commission**

1.9 The following questions were identified in relation to each of the research aims

### *Deployment*

- What specific tasks are support staff asked to take?
- Do support staff provide specific interventions to pupils or do they support teachers and pupils more generally?
- Do support staff work with certain groups such as e-fsm, low attaining, more able and talented and ALN pupils?
- Do school leaders and teachers have a different view of the role of support staff?

### *Professional Learning*

- What educational qualifications and experience to support staff possess?
- What opportunities for professional learning are available for support staff?
- Do support staff have access to these opportunities?
- What additional opportunities do school leaders, teachers and support staff believe should be available?

### *Impact*

- What guidance/evidence is available to school leaders and teachers on the role of support staff and is this used?
- What expectations do school leaders and teacher have of support staff?
- What performance management processes do schools use to assess the impact and needs of support staff?
- In what other ways do school leaders and teachers assess the effectiveness of support staff?
- What additional guidance/information do school leaders and teachers need relating to the most effective deployment of support staff?

### *Effective Practice*

- What do school leaders, teachers and support staff regard as being effective practice?
- What evidence is there on deployment, professional learning and impact to support their views?

### **Existing Research**

1.10 Research on the impact that support staff have on teaching quality and student achievement is, in relative terms, in its infancy. Much of this research relates to developments in England but there is a small amount of relevant evidence from Wales and some from Scotland.

#### *Research and Evidence from England*

- 1.11 Research undertaken in England over the last twenty years has culminated in a series of studies (Whitehorn, 2010; Higgins et al, 2016; Blatchford et al, 2012; Russell et al, 2012; Webster and Blatchford, 2017) which suggest that whilst support staff can make a difference to the management of classrooms, they do not have a major impact on the learning and development of children unless this is specifically planned for and supported by appropriate professional development.
- 1.12 This research and other studies (for example Rubie-Davies et al, 2010 and Whitehorn, 2010) also suggest that the overuse or inappropriate use of support staff in classrooms can potentially prove counter-productive, to the extent that the more support pupils received from support staff, the less progress they make. This can particularly be the case where support staff are more focused on assisting pupils at task completion and not developing pupils learning and understanding in the way that highly effective teachers are able to do. It has been recommended that the development of pupil learning should never be left entirely to support staff and their deployment and effectiveness should be carefully evaluated within each school.
- 1.13 The outcomes of this research are reflected in the meta-analysis of research evidence undertaken by the Education Endowment Foundation to provide guidance for schools on the most effective use of teaching assistants (Sharpley et al, 2018).

This guidance<sup>1</sup> suggested that teaching assistants can have a positive impact on academic achievement if the following conditions are met:

- They should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low-attaining pupils.
- They should be used to add value to what teachers do, not replace them.
- They should help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning.
- They should be fully prepared for their role in the classroom.
- They should deliver high-quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions.
- They should adopt evidence-based interventions.
- They should ensure that explicit connections are made between learning from everyday classroom teaching and structured interventions.

1.14 The importance of professional development opportunities being offered to support staff is being further reinforced by the MITA (Maximizing the Impact of Teaching Assistants) project being funded by the *Education Endowment Foundation*. This is working with 60 primary schools across England to implement an innovative package of strategic support for school leaders and professional development for teaching assistants. Its initial findings suggest that the effect of this support on teaching assistants helps to raise 'their profile and considerably lift both their confidence and sense of value'. This has led to more effective collaboration with teachers and an improved focus on developing pupils as independent learners (Webster, 2018).

1.15 A recently published study based on research which for the first time draws heavily on the voice of support staff themselves, found that 'they often feel dissociated and detached from the wider school workforce, prone to weak or confused leadership and management and lacking in a distinctive voice'. The conclusion of the research was that the deployment, management and leadership of support staff in many

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<sup>1</sup> [EEF Evidence Summary of Effectiveness of Teaching Assistants](#)

schools is 'still haphazard, relying on good intentions rather than strategic imperatives' (Basford, 2017).

- 1.16 Another study found that such has been the change in the expectations of the role of support staff, that they now undertake a myriad of roles including support for learners, behaviour interventions, addressing the social and emotional problems of pupils, parental engagement, inclusion work and support for the curriculum. They also believe themselves to be increasingly subject to stronger accountability measures as more emphasis is placed on the impact they have on pupils' standards. Given that they initially saw their posts as a 'job of convenience' rather than a career choice, many now find themselves performing a role which they did not expect to be undertaking and for which they believe they have not been prepared (Nash, 2014 and see also Butt and Lowe, 2012 and Sharma and Saland, 2016).
- 1.17 This research implicitly raises the issue of the qualifications which support staff possess prior to commencing their employment. A survey of all school support staff in England undertaken in 2010 for the Department for Education revealed that approximately 10% had no qualifications, about 50% had attained GCSE level, 20/25% AS or A level and about 10% were graduates (Whitehorn, 2010).
- 1.18 Other findings from this survey pointed to the positive impact that support staff can have on teacher workloads, job satisfaction and stress levels (Whitehorn, 2010). However, it found that very few teachers had received training on how best to work with support staff and that performance management of support staff was variable in quality and often weak. It also noted that support staff generally undertook professional development opportunities for personal rather than career reasons because of the lack of opportunities for promotion and career progression (Whitehorn, 2010).
- 1.19 The following extract from this report captures well its conclusions:  
  
'The culture and ethos of the school is a key factor in the effective deployment of support staff. In schools where support staff were effectively deployed there was a strong culture of professionalism and accountability for all staff. Support staff had

clear career structures, were well-trained and well-managed and were clear about how their work contributed to pupils' learning. However, it appears that the strategic deployment of support staff is still evolving in schools. Often decisions about deployment are made by teachers in the absence of strategic direction' (Whitehorn, 2010, p53).

- 1.20 A more recent review of research literature in this area in 2016 suggested that there continues to be no clarity at the level of government or in the education system itself on the roles of support staff and this has implications for their deployment, training and the terms and conditions of their employment. It argues that the UK Government has 'actively transferred responsibility from Whitehall to schools' in this area leading to the wide varieties in practice that exist (Clarke and Visser, 2016, p269). In Wales, however, it is local authorities, rather than schools, which draw up the terms and conditions on which support staff are employed.

*Research and Evidence from Wales*

- 1.21 The 2007 One Wales programme for government included a commitment to develop a national strategy for school support staff. This led to the Welsh Government commissioning research in this area. All schools in Wales were asked to complete a questionnaire relating to all their support staff which 27% of primary schools completed and four qualitative interviews were undertaken in schools (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b).
- 1.22 The main conclusions of that research showed.
- As 95% of school support staff were female the report suggested this had 'implications for the general ambience of schools' due to the lack of male role models in the teaching and support staff, particularly in primary schools (p119).
  - As 57% of support staff were over the age of 40 and given difficulties that schools were facing in recruiting support staff, there could be future challenges in maintaining the size of the support staff workforce.

- The low pay available to support workers led to recruitment and perception problems which were impacting negatively on the development of the workforce.
- Many support staff believed that they 'carry out many of the tasks attributed to teachers but for a fraction of the salary' (p120).
- The overall profile of support staff qualifications was low with a minority being qualified to Level 4.
- Basic training of support staff was adequate but professional development was limited.
- Inadequate funding for schools restricted the numbers that could be appointed to become HLTAs.
- Staff appraisal was variable and the lack of this or its, often informal, nature reinforced the perception of support staff being a 'casual workforce'.
- The impact that support staff had was recognised but rarely quantified.

1.23 In relation to the potential for a national structure for support staff the following considerations were put forward in the report.

- There was a feeling among some groups that if a national structure was to be developed it should include all support staff.
- It should allow for flexibility according to local conditions and history.
- There was a case for more formal and standardised arrangements for appraisal and performance management.
- The development of career paths would raise staff motivation and could be linked to the gaining of qualifications.
- Pay levels should be addressed, possibly through comparison with similar roles in other sectors in the economy; national pay scales for certain roles could be considered.
- The pressing need to address the gender imbalance.
- Compulsory unionisation of certain roles could help improve pay and conditions for staff.

- Job re-evaluations should be carried out regularly, particularly in view of technological change and school reorganisation.
- Entitlements for initial training and continuous professional development.
- The need for good marketing to aid recruitment to some support staff roles.
- A National Structure should not impact on the conditions of work of teachers or other professions. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b p121-122).

1.24 Ultimately the Welsh Government decided to continue with local authority single status agreements for support staff and not to adopt national arrangements.

1.25 In 2013 the Welsh Government published an action plan on school support staff.<sup>2</sup> This recognised the importance of all school support staff being 'able to access appropriate support and training including progression routes' and the necessity for initial and further training qualifications being fit for purpose. This was to be achieved through a 'Practice, Review and Development Process' focused on professional standards, performance management and continuous professional development (Welsh Government, 2013b: 3).

1.26 The plan set out specific actions that would be taken on:

- qualifications
- professional standards
- the role of Higher- Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs)
- a support staff induction programme
- performance management
- continuous professional development
- professional registration of the workforce
- improving workforce data.

1.27 Some elements of the action plan were embedded in the Education Wales Bill (2013) including the setting up in 2015 of the *EWC* as a successor to the General

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<sup>2</sup> [Welsh Government Action plan to promote the role and development of support staff in schools in Wales](#)

Teaching Council for Wales. The EWC was empowered to require support staff, for the first-time, to register with a professional body.

- 1.28 In 2017 the EWC undertook a survey of its registered workforce including support staff.<sup>3</sup> In relation to deployment, a large majority of the support staff who responded reported that they were involved in one-to-one support for pupils, groupwork and supporting learners with specific needs such as those with ALN or behavioural problems. Most staff responding had undertaken some form of professional learning in the last twelve months: mainly through attending courses, workshops and conferences with about one-third participating in the sharing of effective practice. Fourteen per cent of respondents had not participated in any professional learning in the previous 12 months. Nearly half of respondents (45.4%) had never received a performance management review including one in the last 12 months.
- 1.29 Estyn does not report directly on the work of school support staff. However, school inspection reports do consider the impact that support staff may have on teaching and standards and these are sometimes summarised in the annual reports of the Chief Inspector. These references suggest that where support staff are involved in planning lessons in primary schools this can lead to good outcomes in terms of pupil achievement but in the small number of primary schools where resources were not well managed, a feature of such shortcomings was the overuse of support staff (Estyn 2015 and 2017).
- 1.30 The Stocktake of the Foundation Phase found that in some cases support staff were being used to support classroom management rather than to improve teaching standards and that in some instances they lacked the level of literacy or numeracy skills to support student learning. This led the report to caution that ‘the quality of the adult is more important than the quantity’ (Siraj, 2014: 87)
- 1.31 The Welsh Government funded evaluation of the Foundation Phase found that there appeared to be no indications that increased child-adult ratios had a major impact on pupil achievement by the end of the Foundation Phase. It did, however, suggest that where support staff had accessed the full professional learning opportunities

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<sup>3</sup> [EWC National Education Workforce Survey](#)

available to them, that their understanding and implementation of its pedagogy was improved. This could be seen to imply that more extensive professional development of support staff might have led to improved academic outcomes by pupils (Welsh Government 2014 and 2015).

*Research and Evidence from Scotland*

- 1.32 Research undertaken for doctoral study on the impact of support staff in Scottish primary schools found that pupils generally felt more supported when these staff were present in classrooms and that the best outcomes were achieved when teachers and support staff collaborated in choosing pedagogical approaches (Stewart, 2009).
- 1.33 Researchers in Scotland undertook a national survey in 2013 of 2,000 headteachers, teachers and classroom assistants supported by interviews with nearly all of the local authority Directors of Education, to collect evidence on the role of school support staff. It found that most support staff were assisting teachers in their work but that the role of some staff has been 'stretched' to include activities that were initially intended for teachers. It concluded that this blurring of roles had occurred because of policy inaction by government (Warhurst et al, 2014).

## **2. Methodology**

- 2.1 In order to address the aims and objectives of the research, a mixed methods approach was designed after discussions with the evaluation steering group which consisted of Welsh Government social research and policy officials and researchers from Cardiff Metropolitan University.
- 2.2 While a survey of support staff distributed to all primary schools in Wales allowed for the views of the broader support staff workforce to be gathered, it was also agreed that more in-depth discussions were required to gather rich information on the roles support staff were being asked to undertake.
- 2.3 It was also agreed that the views of key stakeholders should be sought including the Regional Education Consortia, Estyn, local authorities, Education Workforce Council, headteacher associations and the support staff trade unions. The local authorities (through the Welsh Local Government Association) and the support staff trade unions assisted with raising awareness of and circulating the survey to LAs and members respectively.
- 2.4 The following research methods were ultimately agreed by the evaluation steering group:
- a review of literature
  - an online survey
  - stakeholder interviews
  - focus groups
  - case-study visits to schools.

### **The Review of Literature**

- 2.5 Searches for qualifying studies were made on the EBSCO, ERIC and Google Scholar databases. Filters were used to identify studies particularly relevant to the UK practice context.
- 2.6 Policy documentation from Welsh Government, the UK Department for Education and the Education Workforce Council and Estyn inspection evidence was also considered.

## **The Online Survey**

- 2.7 An online survey was developed in consultation with the evaluation steering group. The survey was piloted, and minor amendments made before being sent to schools.
- 2.8 An online survey seeking the view of headteachers was circulated by email to 1,260 primary schools in Wales for the attention of the headteacher. Regular emailed reminders were sent via direct mailing and the Dysg newsletter.
- 2.9 One hundred and seventy-six headteachers completed the survey with returns from schools in all local authorities across Wales. The majority of schools returning the survey were English-medium (65 per cent) with 26 per cent Welsh-medium and 7 per cent bilingual. Further information on response rates and schools can be found in Annex 1.
- 2.10 An online survey seeking the views of support staff was sent by email to primary headteachers requesting them to forward it to on to their support staff for completion. In addition, two of the support staff trade unions (UNISON and the GMB) circulated it to their members. Details of the survey and a web link to the survey were also included in the Dysg Newsletter and on social media.
- 2.11 The survey was completed by 560 support staff with responses from 21 of the 22 local authority areas. Further details on the characteristics of those who responded can be found in Annex 2.

## **Stakeholder Interviews**

- 2.12 These were undertaken with nominated representatives of
- Estyn.
  - Regional Education Consortia.
  - National Association of Headteachers in Wales.
  - Welsh Government officials.
  - A group of local authority HR staff.
  - Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC).
  - Welsh Local Government Association.
  - UNISON.

- GMB.
- Education Workforce Council.

2.13 In relation to the Regional Education Consortia the interviews involved Consortia officers leading on professional development work with support staff, including seconded school staff and representatives of support staff.

### **Focus Groups**

2.14 In Central South Consortium the headteachers of five schools identified by the Consortium as being examples of where effective practice was taking place were identified to participate in a focus group. Two attended: one from a large special school and the other from an urban school in a mixed socio-economic catchment area.

2.15 In EAS, the headteachers of five schools identified by the Consortium as being examples of where effective practice was taking place were invited to attend a focus group. Three attended: one from a school in a relatively affluent part of a city; one from an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage in the same city and the third from a mixed rural/urban area of the region.

2.16 In ERW a focus group of nine people was organised by the Consortium to represent senior school staff and HLTAs involved in developing their professional learning pathways for school support staff.

2.17 A focus group arranged for the GwE region had to be cancelled because of hazardous weather conditions on the day of the scheduled visit. It was not possible to re-arrange the session due to timetabling issues and participant availability.

### **Case Study Visits**

2.18 Each Consortium identified five or six schools in their region where effective practice was in place representing a mix of socio-economic, size, English and Welsh-medium variables. From these lists a sample was agreed between the research team and Welsh Government to ensure a broad mix and two schools were approached in each region. Visits were undertaken to these schools in the CSC, EAS and ERW regions but the visits to the GwE schools had to be cancelled

because of the weather conditions as set out above in relation to focus groups. As a result telephone interviews were undertaken with schools in this region instead.

- 2.19 For each of the case-study schools a range of staff were interviewed including the headteacher/deputy headteacher, teaching staff and support staff.

*Analysis of Interviews*

- 2.20 All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A series of codes, based on the research questions agreed with Welsh Government, were identified to provide an analytical framework.

- 2.21 The transcriptions, having initially been read in full to establish their overall meaning and overarching view, were then thematically analysed using these codes to produce an evidence base which could be reflected in the findings on each of the research questions.

### **3. Findings**

3.1 The section reports on the findings from the literature review, the online surveys and the qualitative fieldwork in relation to the three main areas of the research: the deployment, professional learning and impact of support staff in primary schools in Wales.

#### **Deployment**

##### *Existing Research Evidence*

3.2 The review of literature set out in section 1 of this report allows for the following conclusions to be arrived at in relation to the deployment of support staff

- It is often not strategic or appropriately planned in many schools.
- The work of support staff has significantly expanded, become diverse and they are often not prepared appropriately for these roles.
- Support staff should not be over-used or inappropriately used, in comparison to teachers.
- They should add value to pupils learning and development and not replace the role of the teacher.
- They should particularly not be over-used in supporting low-attaining pupils.
- Their most effective deployment is in one-to-one work and small group support using evidence-based interventions.
- They should plan jointly with teachers and receive regular feed-back, but this occurs very infrequently.

##### *Growth*

3.3 As many of those interviewed during this research explained, the initial growth of support staff numbers in Wales in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was often made possible through women (many of whom were the mothers or relatives of children at a school) 'volunteering' to undertake part-time work in the school and then receiving some basic vocational training. This led to the popular conception of these staff being a 'mum's' army' who had 'walked off the streets' to work in the schools.

3.4 Tables 2 and 3 summarising the responses to the Headteacher survey, show the majority (77 per cent) of schools who responded use grant funding to employ some of their support staff.

**Table 2: Percentage of support staff employed totally using grant funding**

Percentage of support staff	% response
0 (none)	23%
1-25	37%
26-50	16%
51-75	15%
76-100	9%
Total	100%

Source: Headteacher Survey, Base: n = 163

**Table 3: Percentage of support staff employed using an element of grant funding with additional funding from elsewhere**

Percentage of support staff	% response
0 (none)	15%
1-25	63%
26-50	12%
51-75	6%
76-100	0%
Never	4%
Total	100%

Source: Headteacher Survey, Base n= 163

- 3.5 89 per cent of the schools responding to the headteacher survey reported that they used some of their Pupil Development Grant allocation to fund support staff usually for specific intervention work with specific target groups that might include pupils eligible for free school meals (e-fsm).
- 3.6 Responses to the support staff survey on the characteristics of support staff (Annex 2) showed
- Most (78 per cent) respondents had worked for 5 years or more as a support worker with 25% being employed in the role for more than 16 years.
  - Over half (around 55 per cent) had only worked in one school with around nine per cent having worked in five or more schools.
  - Most respondents (65 per cent) had worked for five years or more at their current school with 16 per cent having worked 16 years or more.
- 3.7 Overall this suggests that the workforce has become a relatively settled one with most staff having worked as a support worker for a prolonged period of time in their current school.

#### *Motivation*

- 3.8 When asked for the reasons why they became support workers, the majority (34 per cent) of respondents reported they enjoyed 'assisting colleagues in advancing pupils' learning'. The opportunities for 'work/life balance' was the next most popular reason attracting 27 per cent of responses (see Annex 3).
- 3.9 The survey also asked for respondents to provide their own responses in relation to their motivations for undertaking their role. 50 of the 460 respondents to the survey gave responses to this. The responses reveals a similar strong vocational desire to support children in their learning and the work/life balance which the role affords.

#### *Roles*

- 3.10 The introduction of the Foundation Phase had a considerable effect on the development of the role of support staff in primary schools. One Consortia Officer, a

former headteacher recalled how support staff became 'more pro-actively involved in small group teaching, in assessment of pupil work, not just preparing for lessons and supporting the teacher'. This also led, in larger primary schools, to the development of what was described as a 'hierarchy' of support staff with some staff focusing solely, for example, on pupil interventions for children with additional learning needs.

- 3.11 Support staff interviewed made the same observations, with one noting how they had to become 'really aware of the curriculum and learning objectives whereas before it was just making sure all the resources were available' (primary support staff member, ERW).
- 3.12 Responses received to the survey of support staff and headteachers reflect how much these changes have influenced the current deployment of support staff. As can be seen in Table 4 high numbers of support staff recorded themselves as 'working with small groups of learners' and 'supporting learners with additional learning needs or behavioural issues'. This was closely followed by other classroom-based activities (one-to-one and whole-class support) and extra-curricular contributions.

**Table 4: What type of work are you asked to undertake in your role as a learning support worker?**

Response	%
Working with small groups of learners	88%
Supporting learners with additional learning needs or behavioural issues	87%
One to one work with learners	81%
Whole class support with teacher present	78%
Delivering or assisting with extracurricular activities outside of the classroom in the school or on trips	73%
Planning and recording of work for learners in my classroom(s)	67%
Managing the welfare and medical care needs of learners	66%
Administrative work not related to my work in the classroom	31%
Other roles (please state)	30%
Supporting multi ethnicity learners/parents/guardians with English as an additional language	27%
Specific role liaising with parents or guardians or the local community	22%

Source: Online survey of support staff, Base n= 517 (multiple responses were allowed)

- 3.13 When asked to provide an indication of the range of activities undertaken as part of ‘other’ activities beyond the multiple-choice options (Annex 6), there were 149 additional responses which serves to highlight the sheer range of duties undertaken by support staff in primary schools. Even though there was specific question about this (see 3.16), a very significant response related to PPA and class cover without a teacher present. Other responses ranged from librarian, to Forest School Leader, to ‘leading assembly once a week’.
- 3.14 The response to the headteacher survey summarised in table 5 produced similar responses for the top three responses.

**Table 5: What type of work do you ask your support staff to do?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Working with small groups of learners	100%
Supporting learners with additional learning needs or behavioural issues	98%
One to one work with learners	97%
Managing the welfare and medical care needs of learners	78%
Whole class support with teacher present	78%
Delivering or assisting with extracurricular activities and other activities outside of the classroom	57%
Planning and recording of work for learners in my classroom(s)	47%
Administrative work not related to work in the classroom	31%
Supporting learners/parents/guardians with English as an additional language	24%
Specific role liaising with parents/ guardians or the local community	23%
Other roles	14%

Source: Survey of headteachers Base n= 176 (multiple responses were allowed)

- 3.15 Overall, headteachers reported that the main use of support staff was in supporting learners in groups or 1:1, with ALN and behaviour issues, all with over 90 per cent response rates. The results also show 78 per cent of headteachers deployed support staff for whole class support with the class teacher present and 47 per cent reported they asked support staff to be involved in planning and recording the work of learners.
- 3.16 The surveys also found the majority of LSWs (84 per cent) reported they were asked to provide support without a teacher present and only a minority (19 per cent) of these reported being employed as a HLTA when doing so. This was supported by

the majority of Headteacher survey responses (74 per cent) who reported they had asked LSWs to provide support without a teacher present. The headteachers reported that 53 per cent of these LSWs were employed as HLTAs. These responses were spread across nearly all local authorities and both English and Welsh-medium schools.

- 3.17 Interviews with senior staff in schools revealed the range of ways that schools are deploying their support staff. One school for instance indicated that they were using their staff to support classes where some degree of Additional Learning Needs support was required, to support pupils with, for example, autism or Down syndrome. Support staff were also providing support to pupils for other physical issues associated with epilepsy for example where mobility was an issue and these support staff were providing assistance which could include help with pupils' personal hygiene needs.

'We have two complex needs resource-based classes- generally cognitive, but complex needs. We have children with autism, we have children with Down syndrome, we have children with various forms of epilepsy, certain physical issues that have come with epilepsy in certain children, so mobility's an issue. Not totally out of the realms of walking around, but they have certain time they might not be strong enough, and they may have to be in a specific chair.'

(Headteacher Primary school, Central South Consortium region)

- 3.18 In undertaking this work the school was deploying support staff of different levels (see Table 1 above for information on these levels) including some experienced Level 4, but mainly Level 2 staff.
- 3.19 Many schools use HLTAs to lead nursery provision, with the Foundation Phase teacher then taking overall leadership of reception and nursery provision. Some headteachers interviewed revealed that this had been done for financial reasons as a HLTA salary was more affordable within their budget than a teacher's salary. Others are often used to cover teacher's classes during their planning, preparation and administration (PPA) time.

3.20 Informants told us that Level 3 staff were used flexibly across their schools, sometimes undertaking their usual within-class work but at other times covering for absent teaching staff.

3.21 One headteacher summarised this flexibility and variety in the deployment of support staff as follows:

‘They are increasingly leading on interventions for the children across schools. They are working with groups of pupils on literacy and numeracy strategies. Schools across our region are increasingly using evidence-based research strategies.... and teaching assistants are taking a lead role in delivering some of those programmes. They are on occasion leading classes of pupils for PPA relief teachers, and sometimes in the absence of teachers, they are leading classes of pupils. They’re leading on clubs, extracurricular activities and going into the community with quite a few working in family liaison and nurture roles.’  
(Headteacher primary school, GwE Region)

3.22 This flexibility and variety was also revealed by an interview of a member of Level 3 support staff in one primary school who provided the following list of her responsibilities:

- support teaching and inform planning
- support the learning and wellbeing of children
- group and individual work
- reading groups
- setting up the classroom
- making resources
- display
- pupil assessments
- encouraging pupil voice
- promoting growth mind-sets
- running intervention programmes (direct phonics, grammar groups, number recovery, catch-up groups)
- playground duty
- classroom cover in other classes
- parent contact
- attend INSET training (child protection, health and safety, data

protection etc.) and staff meetings

- participate in the support staff development programme

- attend network meetings to share ideas.

3.23 As outlined above some support staff are involved in one-to-one support for pupils with ALN. The funding which is attached to these pupils is held by the local authority and delegated to the schools. It is, therefore, lost if the pupil moves on from the school. Support staff, headteachers and the support staff unions reported that due to the insecurity and potential lack of continuity of employment associated with these situations, support staff were often reluctant to rely solely on such work and to stay in these posts for too long.

3.24 As a result of this whilst most support staff are content to undertake roles which involve them in a range of responsibilities, an increasing number do spend some or even, in a small number of cases, the whole of their time undertaking specialist work. This can include support for pupils for whom English is an additional language, leading on pupil wellbeing strategies, behaviour approaches, speech and language development and parent/ family liaison work.

3.25 An example of the specialist work which support staff sometimes provide was given by one Level 3 staff member who had been trained as Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA). He was providing counselling support across the school for any child with emotional literacy needs.

'I was asked if I could become an ELSA, which is an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant, working closely with the educational psychologists, so I was sent off for training for a year and that became my predominant role within the school. I'm not an educational psychiatrist but I do offer counselling and just to be there for the children, for any child with emotional literacy needs.' (Support staff primary school, EAS region)

3.26 In some instances, as confirmed by evidence from Estyn and the Regional Education Consortia, this specialist intervention work might involve support staff working with groups of pupils who are low attaining, with the staff involved often

being partly or wholly funded through the Pupil Development Grant. Such practice does not, however, reflect research evidence and the advice given by Welsh Government that a more effective use of this funding would be to release highly experienced and competent teachers to work with these pupils.

### *Workload*

3.27 Given the expansion and diversification of the roles of support staff it is perhaps unsurprising that only a small majority of respondents to the support staff survey (46 per cent) agreeing they felt able to manage their current workloads with a sizable minority (39 per cent) disagreeing. The full results are shown in table 6.

**Table 6: Level of agreement with the statement ‘I am able to effectively manage my existing workload within my agreed working hours.’**

Answer	%	Combined agree/neutral/disagree
Strongly agree (SA)	13%	Agree: 46%
Somewhat agree (A)	33%	
Neither agree nor disagree (N)	15%	15%
Somewhat disagree (D)	24%	Disagree: 39%
Strongly disagree (SD)	15%	
Total	100%	

Source: Support staff survey n= 452

3.28 One respondent to the support staff survey expressed these concerns about workload as follows:

‘I regularly cover PPA throughout school from Reception through to Yr 6. The teachers I cover in class always have support of some description however when I cover PPA I usually have no support, especially in the year group that I actually work with. We are asked to hold afterschool clubs which run after our paid role finishes with no extra pay/overtime. Once a week we are requested to attend staff meetings and again these can often run over by one to two hours outside our contracted roles. Our workloads in school now is so

heavily concentrated in us delivering lessons to pupils rather than just supporting children” (primary school support staff member, EAS Region).

### *Higher Level Teaching Assistants*

- 3.29 As indicated above, as part of the 2003 Workload Agreement, it was permitted for HLTAs, under the direction and supervision of an experienced manager, to be engaged for part of their time in whole class teaching in nursery and reception classes and to support teacher PPA time. Representatives of Estyn pointed out to us that HLTAs are also increasingly used for specialist teaching where they have a qualification or experience in curriculum areas. Similarly Some Regional Education Consortia informed us that they used HLTAs for specialist work in leading wellbeing interventions with pupils.

‘the agreement at the time of PPA coming in was that it was the headteacher’s judgement to ensure that the person taking the class had suitable experience and skills...and occasionally when they’re used, they’re used for very precise reasons. They’re used for, let’s say, art because they have a particular experience or qualification in art, IT sometimes. I’ve seen them used for PE very effectively’ (School Inspector, Estyn)

- 3.30 Some HLTAs pointed out that their teaching activity often now extends into other contexts including covering for teachers when absent rather than supply teachers being employed. In one case, a HLTA reported that they worked as a teacher for 75 per cent of their time across a number of classes in the school and the other 25 per cent as a classroom assistant tied to a particular class.

‘My role is a HLTA and I’m paid HLTA, part of the Senior Management Team within the school. I’m also expected to be a Classroom Assistant full-time on that, as well. So, I’m tied to a class continuously all week, as well. I’m paid as a HLTA, a Level 5 or something like that and it’s the comparison of an unqualified teacher rate but it actually isn’t, it doesn’t work out the same. So, I sometimes feel like you’re doing a huge amount of work, almost a teaching role. At one point I was teaching 75 per cent of the week, 75 per cent of my

time was actually teaching, and you don't get recognised for that. You're still a Teaching Assistant, you know.' (Primary school HLTAs, ERW region)

- 3.31 One headteacher justified this type of deployment of HLTAs and the role they may play in leading groups of support staff, as it allowed teaching staff to be released for professional learning activity:

'What that does for the school, I think, is gives that school capacity. It will allow you then to release staff for professional learning, release teachers for professional learning, give you that capacity'. (Seconded headteacher, GwE region).

### *Support Staff and Teaching Roles*

- 3.32 As has been shown above, evidence from the headteacher survey indicates that there is also an increasing tendency for support staff who are not HLTAs to become involved in what is usually regarded as mainstream teaching activity. One support staff member pointed out that this often resulted from increased teacher workload so that they could have 'a session in the afternoon or half an hour in the morning where they catch up on the extra-curricular activities that they have to do and the paperwork.'
- 3.33 Local Authority Human Resources staff and the support staff trade unions reported that support staff were increasingly being asked to carry out roles that they believe should be undertaken by teachers. Their perception was that this resulted from these staff not being well managed at school level. This is confirmed by the support staff survey where 84% of respondents indicated they had been asked to cover a class without a teacher present.
- 3.34 As schools, Consortia and the teaching associations confirmed this 'inappropriate' use of support staff other than HLTAs, now included widespread examples of them covering teacher absences rather than supply teachers being employed for that purpose. This was often the result of funding difficulties in schools that made this a more acceptable option.

### *The Employment Status of Support Staff*

- 3.35 Whilst it was not part of the remit of this research to consider the conditions of service of support staff, the wide variations in roles, responsibilities and employment levels of support staff which have resulted from the piecemeal, unplanned and rapid development of this workforce, have inevitable consequences for their deployment. This was highlighted in the survey evidence, the interviews with stakeholders and the case-study visits and focus groups in schools.
- 3.36 The support staff survey asked respondents to indicate details about their employment circumstances and the results can be seen in Annex 4. These show considerable variance in the levels and terms of employment. The highest percentage response is highlighted in each part of the table, but overall 51 per cent of the sample are employed on permanent contract, thus with holiday pay. Another 32 per cent are employed on a permanent basis but in term time. A majority (61 per cent) of support staff are employed on a full-time basis (35+ hours), but this still leaves many (39 per cent) working part-time.
- 3.37 Officials of support staff trade unions were unhappy about the variance in roles and responsibilities for support staff and were keen to see a more formalised national approach to this.

‘The biggest problem is the disparity and the inconsistency in roles, deployment, levels, grades, duties attached to those grades. It’s just an absolute mess. There was a commitment that we had in the One Wales Agreement, for a national structure for support staff and we, [the two main unions], are united on this. We still think that that’s what’s needed. A structure that you make sense from the top and then gets implemented at local level – not something that we figure out what’s happening at local level and then try and make sense of it afterwards.’ (Union Official)

- 3.38 They also reported that that increasingly their members were being asked to lead whole classes as headteachers were able to justify this through the ‘any other duties’ clause contained within standard job descriptions. Local Authority HR staff confirmed this to be the case and that this was a result of job descriptions being very broad, as can be seen in the regulations outlined above. The inclusion of a

clause allowing 'for any other duties' to be undertaken had allowed the drift in job roles including into whole-class teaching to take place. Because they had been created over 15 years ago, these job descriptions had been overtaken by developments in the workforce.

- 3.39 The stakeholder organisations interviewed for this research suggested that generally headteachers are not sure how best to deploy their support staff, lack guidance on this and are usually left to their own devices. This led to the confusion and variation that existed between schools, local authorities and Consortia on roles, responsibilities, grading and salary levels.
- 3.40 One headteacher, currently seconded with one of the Consortia pointed out that this could lead to situations where schools 'do not want to talk to you about deployment because they are terrified that they are doing something wrong'. He reported that what 'they're often describing is a Level 4 post and they are being paid Level 1 or Level 2 and it's happening because there is no clear steer on it'.
- 3.41 The research also identified that recently some local authorities have recently re-evaluated support staff grades and salaries with, in the case of some of the schools visited, this resulting in a loss of status and pay for some support staff.

#### *Teamwork*

- 3.42 The interviews with teachers and support staff identified examples of joint planning taking place between them of the type highlighted as effective practice in the research literature.

'Our TAs meet with the teachers every week and they plan together, they also meet to look up what the children have done so that the TAs can feedback to the teachers. And that happens every week. Teacher's planning is put on the hub and all the TAs have access to the teacher's planning so it is shared, so they can look at it as and when they want to. We ... we did quite a lot of work with our TAs last year. And that happens right throughout the school, so from nursery up to Year 6, the TAs plan with the teachers and have access to that planning at all times. [Teacher primary school, EAS region].

3.43 This was also mentioned by support staff when asked to provide open responses to the survey. Some of the most positive aspects were given as:

- 'Working in an inclusive school where my ideas and opinions are valued by teachers and headteacher and my skills are used'
- 'All members of staff communicate in order to keep good practice'
- 'Looking at their level of experience and qualifications and using them in the best way possible.'
- 'Good communication is key and having support within the workplace.'
- 'Putting the children first always.'
- 'Being included in staff meeting, up to date with day to day changes, being appreciated, asked for my opinion and ideas.'
- 'For all staff to have a voice and ideas listened to and considered, to be involved.'

3.44 The open responses also showed negative features of their experience which were identified and included:

- 'Not being given extra preparation time as teachers have. (I'm) not expected to do work at home but do so that so I can do my job more efficiently.'
- 'On a weekly basis I can be asked to cover a class in any year group up to 3 consecutive days! As there is very little money in the budget this is now a regular occurrence..., cover seems to be needed more and more regularly and always filters down to us. This often means that interventions are missed and the children that most need support miss out.'
- 'When the unions agreed the different roles of support workers our job descriptions changed, but I feel that there is a lack of understanding within the school as to what roles each support worker is employed to do.'

- ‘Cover Supervisor contracts are being issued to LSWs in order for them to actively teach without a teacher being present. This is not best practice. Cover Supervisor contracts do not reflect the duties which are asked of staff. It is my belief they are being mis-used in Primary Schools. This is teaching “on the cheap”.’
- ‘As part of my role I am required to plan, resource and deliver high quality learning experiences for children that is equal to a qualified teacher. However, I am not a qualified teacher and qualified teachers are given planning time. I am expected to perform equally as a teacher but no time given. The historical view that LSW's are not equal to qualified teachers needs to be eradicated in order to improve status and well-being.’

#### *Other Evidence*

3.45 Other evidence collected on deployment highlighted the following issues:

- In some cases, headteachers reported that in recent years as a result of budget constraints they have had to reduce the number of support staff they employ. 78 per cent of respondents to the headteacher survey reported a decrease in the number of support staff in the last three years. 47 per cent of headteachers responding expected this decline in numbers to continue in the 2018-19 school year.
- As pointed out by the EWC, there are now more support staff than teachers on the registers of supply agencies.
- EWC also highlighted that supply teachers on their register also work as support staff because they can't always get teaching opportunities.
- The difficulties, highlighted by UCAC, Welsh-medium schools face in finding support staff with appropriate Welsh Language skills.

## **Professional Learning**

### *Research Evidence*

- 3.46 The research evidence reviewed in chapter 1, indicated the following features in relation to the current professional learning of support staff:
- Although a growing percentage of support staff are likely to have L4+ qualifications, these are still a minority of support staff.
  - Undertaking professional development is critically important if support staff are to be appropriately and effectively deployed as it enables them to improve the impact they have on pupils and to develop their own profile, confidence and self-worth.
  - Usually support staff undertake professional development for personal rather than career reasons as there may be no financial incentive, promotion opportunities or career development opportunities to provide motivation.
  - The low pay which many support staff receive, their self -perception of being low status and the nature of their contracts, sometimes inhibits their desire to engage in professional development.
  - Opportunities to access professional development are often dependent on the attitudes of individual school leaders.
  - Whilst support staff often report positively on training opportunities available to them, higher levels of professional development (which they sometimes require for the roles they are asked to perform) are often not available to them including those which would offer a career pathway and the chance to acquire higher levels of qualifications.

### *Qualifications*

- 3.47 Table 7 provides the current level of qualifications of support staff based on the support staff survey. LSWs were asked to tick all that apply so the table shows total number holding each level.
- 3.48 In the survey, 28 per cent hold degree level qualifications or higher. A minority of the sample (26 per cent) had completed the HLTA scheme and a very small number (5 per cent) held Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

**Table 7: Qualification level of support staff**

Qualification	%
Entry level 1-3	16%
Level 1 - e.g. GCSE D-G, Welsh Bacc Foundation	11%
Level 2 - e.g. GCSE A*-C, Welsh Bacc National, Essential Skills	41%
Level 3 - e.g. AS/A level, Welsh Bacc Advanced, Access to Higher Education	53%
Level 4 - e.g. HNC, Cert. of Higher Education,	19%
Level 5 - e.g. Foundation Degree, HND	14%
Level 6 - Honours Degree, Professional Certificates in Higher Education	23%
Level 7 - e.g. Masters' Degree, PGCE	5%
Level 8 – Doctorate	0%

Source: Support Staff Survey n= 516 (multiple responses allowed)

3.49 There was interest in gaining additional qualifications with 56 per cent saying they were 'keen to gain additional qualifications to support my work as LSW', and an additional 31 per cent saying they 'may be', with only a minority (19 per cent) replying 'no'. Annex 4 provides further breakdowns on the areas of interest in gaining additional qualifications. The largest number were interested in becoming a HLTA with a large proportion interested in ALN qualifications. There is a relatively small number of support workers (just seven) directly stating an interest in progressing to QTS – although 26 mentioned gaining a degree (not specified as QTS) or 'HLTA/QTS'.

3.50 Most of the stakeholders interviewed pointed to the generally low level of educational qualifications held by support staff before they take up their posts. This necessitated initial professional development that was focused on basic skills. The Regional Education Consortia noted that this situation and the wide range of roles, responsibilities and job descriptions that existed provided them with significant challenges in providing appropriate professional learning.

### *Current Professional Learning*

3.51 The survey of support staff indicated that 71% had undertaken some form of professional learning in the previous 12 months. The types of activity undertaken by these staff only in shown in table 8.

**Table 8: Professional learning activities undertaken by support staff in the previous 12 months**

<b>Response</b>	<b>%</b>
Attended courses, workshops, conferences, seminars (including e-learning) funded by school	88%
Access to and using Hwb or other virtual learning environment	42%
Learned to use new technologies for use in teaching and learning activities	41%
Had colleagues observe your work and give you feedback	39%
Demonstrated / shared your best practice with others	35%
Worked on something new (e.g. an initiative, project, activity, teaching a new subject / year group)	33%
Read publications, books, journals, articles (hard copy or online) or researched a topic	33%
Acquired additional skills and knowledge as part of a new post or role	31%
Observed colleagues' work or shadowed them	20%
Studied for academic qualifications (e.g. Certificate of Higher Education)	16%
Acted as a mentor or coach for others	16%
Received support from a mentor or coach	14%
Undertaken research (not for qualification)	10%
Other (please state)	5%

Source: Support staff survey n= 352 (multiple responses allowed)

- 3.52 Table 8 shows that attending courses, workshops, conferences, seminars (including e-learning) were the most dominant forms of professional learning (88 per cent of those who have participated). However, the use of online learning of some kind, including Hwb or other technologies, was second at 42 per cent. When combined with responses to e-learning in other categories, the growing importance of learning to use technology is underlined. The two similar strands of working with colleagues in school to receive feedback on performance or to share or demonstrate best practice had been undertaken by 39 per cent and 35 per cent of respondents.
- 3.53 Although 33 per cent of respondents indicated that they had read publications, books, journals, articles (hard copy or online) or researched a topic, in view of developing priorities in Welsh education, the very low response of 10 per cent of respondents 'undertaking research' is worth noting.
- 3.54 Tables 9 and 10 provide information from the support staff survey on where those who had received professional learning took place and who was the provider. It is noticeable that 80 per cent of this is school-based and that providers are a mixture of school staff, Regional Education Consortia and external providers, with school staff (including from other schools) being the largest providers (86 per cent).

**Table 9: Where did professional learning take place?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>%</b>
In your school	80%
At a venue hosted by the regional education consortia	36%
In another school	28%
At a venue hosted by the LA	23%
Elsewhere	14%

Source: Support Staff survey n= 348(multiple responses allowed)

**Table 10: Who delivered the professional learning?**

Answer	%
External provider	72%
School staff	56%
Staff from another school	30%
Consortia	25%
Other	8%
LA staff	0%

Source: Support Staff Survey n= 348 (multiple responses allowed)

- 3.55 As table 11 reveals, those responding to the headteacher survey also identified that most (82 per cent) of the professional learning opportunities for support staff came through courses, workshops, conferences and seminars, including using e-learning. This included a particular emphasis on training for the use of new technologies (81 per cent).
- 3.56 As with the support staff survey, the headteacher survey identified the most common venue for professional learning was the school, either the headteachers own school (98 per cent) or another school (70 per cent). Regional consortia venues were also widely used. In common with the support staff responses, Hwb was also used for training by 24 per cent of headteachers. Interviews with support staff in schools, however, suggested that because their contracts require them to work full-time in their role it is often difficult for them to be able to take the time to observe effective practice in their own schools and elsewhere.

**Table 11: Which professional learning activities have headteachers provided or funded for LSWs in the last 12 months?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
Enabled LSWs to attend courses, workshops, conferences, seminars (including e-learning) funded by school	82%
Provided training on how to use new technologies for use in teaching and learning activities	81%
Enabled LSWs to acquire additional skills and knowledge as part of a new post or role	78%
Enabled LSWs to work on something new (e.g. an initiative, project, activity, teaching a new subject / year group)	75%
Access training and use Hwb	70%
Provided opportunities for LSWs to demonstrate/ shared their best practice with others	64%
Enabled LSWs to study for academic qualifications (e.g. Certificate of Higher Education)	61%
Provided training on accessing and using Hwb or other virtual learning environment.	51%
Provided opportunities for LSWs to observe colleagues' work or shadow them	44%
Provided opportunities for LSWs to observe work of other LSWs and give you feedback to leadership on lessons learned	36%
Enabled LSWs to receive support from a mentor or coach	35%
Enabled LSWs to read publications, books, journals, articles (hard copy or online) or research a topic	33%
Enabled LSWs to act as a mentor or coach for others	29%
Enabled LSWs to undertake research (not for qualification)	13%
Other	8%

Source: Headteacher Survey n= 165 (multiple responses allowed)

- 3.57 In common with the support staff data, headteachers report that nearly all (95%) of the professional learning took place in school hours and a very significant majority (91 per cent) of headteachers used their own staff to provide the professional learning, with 62 per cent using consortia staff and 43 per cent using staff from other schools. Again, in support of the support staff data, headteachers report some use of external providers (62 per cent) and LA staff (53 per cent). In contrast to the support staff, although headteachers report some use of further education institutions, none reported use of the higher education providers mentioned by support staff, this may suggest that support staff access professional learning from this source without schools' awareness.
- 3.58 The interviews held with support staff suggested that in only a small number of cases do school support staff participate jointly with teaching staff in staff meetings and school-based professional development sessions.
- 3.59 The survey of support staff also identified the main barriers that support staff perceived in undertaking professional learning. Responses are shown in table 12.
- 3.60 Table 12 shows that support staff perceive the financial cost to both the school and the individual as the main barrier to accessing professional learning. The potential cost to the school budget was given by 73 per cent of respondents, while 30 per cent indicated that personal cost was a factor inhibiting their access to professional learning.

**Table 12: What are the main barriers /obstacles stopping support staff from accessing professional learning?**

Answer	%
Cost to school budget	73%
Conflict with your work / not enough time in workload/school day	45%
Lack of awareness of professional development opportunities	31%
Personal cost	30%
Home, family, personal commitments	22%
Lack of support from your employer/manager	22%
Your professional development does not form part of the school's current development plan (SDP)	16%
The relevant professional learning is not available or of sufficient quality	10%
Other (please state)	4%
Resources not available in Welsh	4%

Source: Support Staff Survey n= 451 (multiple responses allowed)

### *Importance of Professional Learning*

3.61 The importance of professional learning for support staff is widely recognised. This was emphasised by one seconded headteacher working with a Regional Education Consortium as follows:

‘You need effective practitioners... reflective, thinking about teaching children, so you’ve got to improve their pedagogical understanding. These are the workforce that spend the vast majority of their time at the chalk face with the children day in, day out, and they are probably the least qualified or least trained in the pedagogy of learning’.

3.62 The same interviewee reflected, however, that the current situation was far removed from this ideal, with many headteachers not focused on the professional development of this part of their workforce.

'I meet a lot of heads and to some extent they're the converted, because they're coming to find out about how they can develop their workforce. But there are an awful lot out there who don't turn up and who don't make the most of their workforce in schools. They don't make the most of the TAs and the resource they've got around them.... There are some that are paying lip service to it, i.e. they'll sign their candidates off to do it because they don't want to be seen as holding them back with their CPD, but they're not utilising them afterwards. What concerns me are the heads who don't turn up to information sessions, and even the ones that come to information sessions... who are unaware of what they can and cannot do is slightly worrying.

[Seconded headteacher, EAS]

- 3.63 Evidence from stakeholders including EWC, the support staff trade unions and Estyn made clear that as the nature of the workforce is changing the type of professional development required will also need to adapt. Of the 30% of support staff now registered with EWC who have provided information on their level of qualifications, 13% are graduates (the same percentage in Table 7 above of support staff responding to the survey) reflecting an increasing trend for undergraduate students from education studies and other degrees to first enter the workforce as support staff even though they will not be gaining a 'graduate premium' for this work. This percentage will also include a small number of the existing workforce who, sometimes with (and at other times without) the support of their schools, are undertaking part-time undergraduate courses.
- 3.64 The support staff trade unions, whilst also recognising that generally their members now had a greater range of qualifications and experience than was the case in the past, maintained that there should be a minimum level of qualification that was expected for different grades of support staff and that professional learning should be in place to help them progress to higher levels.

### *Professional Learning Needs*

- 3.65 Table 13 shows the responses of support staff on where they feel they require further professional learning.
- 3.66 The responses in relation to areas such as behaviour management, groupwork and ALN reflect the dominant roles and responsibilities of support staff identified earlier. As will be considered below, their increasing role in supporting pupil well-being is also reflected here. The focus on ICT skills aligns strongly with existing professional learning provision pointed to above.

**Table 13: Areas in which support staff would welcome further development?**

Answer	%
Learner behaviour management strategies	55%
ICT and digital skills	55%
Working with learners with additional needs	44%
Learner well-being	37%
Directed learning for small groups	35%
Welsh language skills	34%
Literacy and/or numeracy	30%
National education policy and Welsh Government national priorities e.g. Literacy and numeracy framework	24%
Learner evaluation and assessment for learning	24%
Reflecting on and evaluating your practice	19%
Subject or phase knowledge	18%
Safeguarding	17%
Equality and diversity	14%
Managing my time more effectively	13%
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children and Young People's Participation Standards	10%
Other	4%

Source: Support Staff Survey n= 447 (multiple responses allowed)

3.67 Twenty-two per cent of the respondents to the support staff survey identified as Welsh-speakers. Over two-thirds of these (69 per cent) indicated they were able to access professional learning in their preferred language. It is noteworthy, however, that when asked 'what language would you prefer to be able to access professional learning', most (60 per cent) chose the medium of English.

3.68 Two other areas of professional learning need were identified in the interviews with stakeholders and in schools. Firstly, the need for extensive support for support staff in the most disadvantaged communities which often faced the greatest difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified support staff. Secondly, the importance of support staff being aware of major changes that were taking place currently in the Welsh education system, particularly the development of the new curriculum.

#### *Meeting Professional Learning Needs*

3.69 The survey results identified how the professional learning needs of support staff are currently being met. At school level this often commences with new support staff being mentored by existing staff.

3.70 The next stage may be for support staff to receive basic training on areas such as health and safety, safeguarding, the EWC code of practice and the use of social media provided either in-house or by outside organisations such as work-based learning providers, local authority HR staff and the EWC.

3.71 A small number of schools have begun to extend this on-the-job training approach in a more systematic way by employing and training support staff as fully-funded apprentices.

3.72 The research found that whereas most schools provide some form of the 'on-the-job' basic training for support staff outlined above, a much smaller number provide opportunities for support staff to develop pedagogical knowledge appropriate to the increased role they undertake in learning and teaching activities.

3.73 In one of the case study schools, in a highly disadvantaged community, the headteacher and governors are responding to this challenge by aiming to have all support staff educated to at least degree level and for those who possess first degrees to progress to Masters' level study. Currently a group of staff are being developed in this way through part-time, jointly funded, routes. The headteacher has noted that as a result of this:

'some of the work that support staff have done in terms of action research has been stronger than some of our teachers, because they've got more

knowledge to pull on when you compare a support staff member who's got 20 years knowledge and an NQT who's one-year in'. (Primary school headteacher, Central South Consortium)

- 3.74 The support staff trade unions provide a wide range of opportunities for their members, some of which have been made possible by the Welsh Government financed Wales Union Learning Fund programme. Whilst initially these opportunities were for basic training, they now focus increasingly on pedagogy and Saturday morning sessions, some of which are provided by the Open University, are reported as being nearly always oversubscribed.
- 3.75 Recently the Regional Education Consortia have become much more involved in providing additional opportunities for support staff to undertake professional learning. This resulted from the Welsh Government's desire to significantly expand the number of HLTAs in schools and the Consortia persuading them that the money would be better spent on developing career pathways that could bring some support staff through to potentially being HLTAs.
- 3.76 In the EAS region the provision has included the Excellent Teaching Assistant Framework which has been adapted from something previously offered to teachers. This focuses upon improving the pedagogical knowledge of support staff commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. The programme is school-based, allowing schools to customise it to their own needs and policies. The provision has been well received, particularly by support staff who see this as evidence of their roles being more greatly valued, although finding release time for them to participate has been a challenge.
- 3.77 Work of this type in the regions has led to the development of a fully-funded learning pathways for support staff being offered by the Regional Education Consortia for the first time in 2017/18 at the following levels:
- Aspiring Teaching Assistants
  - Newly Appointed Teaching Assistants
  - Practicing Teaching Assistants
  - Aspiring HLTAs

- Specialised HLTAs.

3.78 The intention is that this will be developed into a national programme by 2018/19 including the use of the emerging Welsh Government Professional Standards for Staff who Assist Teaching. The programmes do not lead to accreditation but staff in need of developing their basic skills and qualifications levels are directed towards local training providers. They have met with strong interest from some schools in the regions: in the GwE region, for example, 450 support staff- about 10 per cent of the workforce- have engaged in the programme in its first year.

*Reasons and Motivation for Professional Learning*

3.79 Fully- funding opportunities such as those offered by the Regional Consortia, should help to overcome the funding barrier identified by the survey as one of the main challenges faced by support staff and schools in undertaking professional learning.

3.80 The issue of being provided with release time to undertake these programmes will, however, remain and will require schools to make this commitment to the professional development of their staff. The current situation whereby often support staff are not provided with release time, has led to the personal motivation of support to undertake professional learning in their own time, being the main deciding factor as to whether they progress from basic training to higher levels of professional development.

3.81 Estyn pointed out that they believe that an increasing number of support staff now possess this self-motivation, reflecting their greater self-esteem and the increased value which is placed by schools on their work. EWC believe that the decision to register support staff has been important in recognising their status in the education workforce and are encouraged that about 4,000 of the 35,000 support staff who have registered with them have already created a professional learning password account.

3.82 Some support staff interviewed made clear, however, that they feel little incentive to undertake professional development as their experience had been that this did not result in any progression in their job status or salaries. Their perspective was generally supported by the headteachers, professional association and Consortia

representatives interviewed. One headteacher currently seconded with one of the Regional Education Consortia expressed this as follows:

‘This is why you can’t avoid the issue in the end of wages and conditions, even though you can’t go into that minefield, you can’t avoid the fact that if you want these people to be pedagogues, then you have to pay them...they must have more than the qualifications that they’ve got at the moment, and you need to pay them commensurately’.

3.83 One form of professional development open to support staff is to progress into a career in teaching. As was noted above, an increasing number of graduates are entering the support staff workforce, some with the intention of undertaking this role either as a ‘taster’ to establish if teaching might be the right career choice for them or to gain work experience before applying for undergraduate or postgraduate teacher education. As one former headteacher informed us, in her experience this can be an appropriate route to becoming an effective teacher through having gained first-hand experience of the classroom and child development before undertaking teacher education.

3.84 Examples like this have created a perception for some observers that many support staff, including HLTAs, are interested in professional development that will progress them into teaching. The evidence from support staff, the trade unions, headteachers and the Consortia made it very clear that except in a small number of cases this is a misconception. This is supported by the survey findings from support staff in Annex 5 below which shows that a small number of those responding were interested in becoming teachers.

3.85 As one trade union official highlighted:

‘Our TAs always say to us “I don’t want to be a teacher. Please stop assuming that I’m in this to be a teacher’. They really value that relationship building with a child or a group of children, and that’s why they do it. So, you know, one I speak to quite regularly, one of our reps, she does interventions on numeracy and maths. She loves that – that’s her passion. And she likes to

get, “I’ve got my group; I know where they need help and I’m going to support the teacher to get them up a bit.” (trade union official)

- 3.86 The research suggests that rather than progressing into teaching, what support staff want are good opportunities to improve their practice in the roles that they currently undertake and a career pathway that enables them to develop their roles and lead to a potential increase in the financial rewards they receive.
- 3.87 What also was apparent, reflecting previous educational research in this area, is the critical importance of school leaders valuing the contributions that support staff make to the school and recognising this through promoting their professional development.
- 3.88 The following extract from an interview with one support staff member illustrates this type of effective practice:

‘We have professional development meetings with the Head probably three times a year, possibly termly. And the very first one we had to have all the indicators of what levels are and you had to say what you’d done, so you highlighted them so you could map what you did in your role. So, people were more aware of exactly what their role was and how important it was. Then the Head would say ‘Well, what would you like to do? What would you like your next step to be?’ And some people wanted to be more involved in the Attachment Aware Schools Project, some people wanted to be specifically engaged with better reading or whatever it might, whatever their interests were’. (Support Staff member, ERW Region).

#### *Other Evidence*

- 3.89 Other evidence that was collected on professional learning included:
- The need for more emphasis to be given in initial teacher education course to the roles and responsibilities of support staff and the most effective way in which they can be deployed in the classroom.

- The extensive interest in and experience which the support staff trade unions have about the professional learning needs of their members and the wide range of work they are undertaking to meet these needs.
- The benefits which some schools believe can be gained from teachers and support staff sometimes undertaking school-based professional learning together.

3.90 During the fieldwork period for this study, the Welsh Government has been completing the first stage of its work on developing professional standards for teaching assistants (TAs) and higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) in schools. These have been developed through engagement with the profession, local authorities/consortia and other stakeholders including the workforce unions. They are aligned with the five-standard model that has been developed for teaching and leadership, and are accompanied by overarching values and dispositions. The standards have been tested in schools and revised to take account of their initial feedback. Draft standards were published in the summer term 2018 for schools to explore and use, prior to the public consultation which opened in the autumn term and closed in March 2019. Consultation responses will be considered and the final revised standards are due to be made available in the summer term, for use in schools from September 2019<sup>4</sup>.

## **Impact**

### *Research Evidence*

- 3.91 Research on the impact that support staff are having on pupils and schools across the education system in the UK, reported in chapter 1, suggests the following:
- Support staff have a positive impact on teacher workloads, job satisfaction, stress levels and where good relationships and collaboration are in place on teaching quality.
  - Support staff generally have a good impact on the management of classrooms including pupil's behaviour and attitudes.

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<sup>4</sup> [Draft professional standards for assisting teaching](#)

- Evidence of their impact on pupil learning is more mixed and depends on whether this was planned for and the level and quality of professional development that has been received.
- If overused, support staff can have a negative impact on learning, teaching and standards particularly on low-attaining pupils and where the focus is on task completion rather than developing the pupils learning skills.
- Evaluation of the impact (in both qualitative and quantitative terms) of support staff on pupils is, therefore, critically important, but currently it is limited, variable, often informal and insufficiently focused on impact.
- Schools do not receive advice from government/local government on effective deployment.
- The significant gender imbalance among support staff has been raised as an issue which may impact upon the learning of boys.
- Teachers and school leaders do not receive professional development on the most effective deployment of support staff

### *Measurable Outcomes*

- 3.92 The existing research has generally focused on measurable outcomes for pupils. Although 91 per cent of headteachers responding to this survey reported that they did try to evaluate any impact that their support staff might have on pupil attainment, they provided little evidence on how this was in fact being carried out.
- 3.93 Overall, the research undertaken for this report did not reveal any examples of such monitoring or evaluation work being robustly and systematically undertaken in primary schools. This confirmed evidence from Estyn that whilst it might be the assumption of parents and others that pupils receiving one-to-one support or small group interventions will make gains in their levels of achievement, there was usually a lack of robust evidence to support such presumptions.
- 3.94 In some limited cases, the research identified that specific small group interventions were carefully monitored for measurable impact by the member of support staff and others in the school. In one example, this was done through pre-assessing pupils number skills before undertaking a ten-week intervention programme and then

carrying out a post-intervention assessment and looking at pupils' books. Such evidence would then be entered into assessment management systems and used as a basis for quarterly and annual reviews of pupil progress.

- 3.95 The research also revealed, however, that school leaders were often wary of the validity of this type of evidence on the grounds that it might be the result of 'task completion' by pupils assisted by support staff, rather than genuine gains in pedagogical understanding and attainment: what one headteacher called 'procedural fluency' rather than 'comprehension fluency'.
- 3.96 It seems clear, therefore, that there is a lack of rigorous evidence from Estyn, Regional Education Consortia, schools, educational research and other possible sources on the measurable impact that support staff may be having on pupil attainment in primary schools in Wales. This was confirmed by all the stakeholders and practitioners we interviewed as part of the research.

#### *'Soft' Outcomes*

- 3.97 Many participants made clear, however, that in their view measurable outputs were not the only way that the impact of support staff can be assessed and that 'soft' measures as well as 'hard' data should be considered.
- 3.98 These 'soft' outcomes might include the impact which support staff have had on reducing teacher workload as well as enriching the experience of pupils. Respondents pointed to many examples of how support staff impacted positively on the well-being of pupils including building one-to-one relationships, nurturing pupils who may be experiencing emotional difficulties outside of school and developing their resilience to undertake learning.
- 3.99 One headteacher interviewed gave the example of a pupil with serious behavioural issues that could have led him to being removed to a Pupil Referral Unit, but who because of the relationships he had developed with support staff who had helped him to rationalise his behaviour and verbalise his feelings, had considerably improved his behaviour over time. This had saved the considerable cost involved in sending the child to a PRU and the impact this may have had on his future.

- 3.100 The support staff trade unions also emphasised this aspect of their members work and how much this was valued by schools, pointing to examples where in areas of socio-economic disadvantage support staff, despite relatively low salaries, would buy equipment for the schools so that pupils could participate fully in lessons.
- 3.101 The Regional Education Consortia stressed the role that support staff have in developing the social skills of pupils such as appropriate behaviour and developing friendships. One of the teacher unions offered the view that the well-being role of support staff has become so extensive that there may be a danger of teachers becoming removed from pastoral work, leading to them having less awareness of the individual needs of pupils, particularly if support staff were to leave their role.
- 3.102 Another benefit of support staff to primary schools that was suggested in the interviews is the fact that so many support staff were more likely to live in the local area of the school and therefore have strong links to the school and the community in which it exists, providing connections with parents, families and the wider community that the teachers may lack.

#### *Appraisal and Performance Management*

- 3.103 It would be a reasonable assumption to make that appraisal/performance management systems for support staff would be in place to identify their impact as well as decide on their professional development. The research suggests that this is not always the case and the tracking or recording of impact is limited and highly variable. The survey of support staff shows that 57% of respondents had a performance review in the last twelve months and 12% identified as never having had a review.
- 3.104 Table 14 summarises responses by support staff to the survey and shows the areas covered when performance reviews had taken place, with it being noticeable that in approximately a quarter of cases these were focused on impact, achieving objectives and contributing to school improvement.

**Table14: Which areas did your last performance management review cover?**

Response	%
Agreeing your performance objectives for the next year	64%
Agreeing your professional development objectives for the next year	58%
Reviewing and reflecting on the professional development you had undertaken	36%
Reviewing and reflecting on your performance against agreed objectives	30%
Reviewing and reflecting on your contribution to school development priorities	30%
Feedback from observation of your work	28%
Reviewing and reflecting on your impact on learner outcomes	26%
Discussion of your workload	23%
Reflecting on my work in relation to professional standards	16%
Reviewing and reflecting on support from line manager	13%
Other (please state)	7%

Source: Support Staff survey n= 396 (multiple responses allowed)

- 3.105 Some headteachers interviewed described how they used performance management of support staff to identify annual targets in areas that the staff member wished to develop and which would also be of benefit to the school. These might be linked to pupil attainment, but they may also be connected to ‘soft measures’ such as the emotional difficulties that children were facing.
- 3.106 In some cases, senior staff look at both the professional development of the staff member and the impact made on individual and groups of children during appraisal sessions, with some using the new professional standards and the EWC professional learning passport to this end.
- 3.107 The evidence provided by the Consortia, Local Authority HR staff and the support staff trade unions suggests that the examples above are, however, confined to a

minority of schools and that in these cases the quality of the impact monitoring process was very variable. A contributory factor to this may be seen by the observation that line-management responsibilities for support staff varied, sometimes being undertaken by headteachers or members of the senior leadership team and on other occasions by a HLTA, but in many schools this relationship was unclear and where it existed at all, informal. The survey of support staff showed that where reviews had taken place these were undertaken by a mixture of headteachers (28 per cent), deputy heads (23 per cent), middle managers (29 per cent), class teachers (7 cent) and others (14 per cent).

- 3.108 Local Authority HR staff believed that often teachers and middle leaders were unsure if support staff were to be appraised. Estyn pointed out that often headteachers and teaching staff had received no professional development on how best to manage support staff and this inevitably impacted on the outcomes they achieved.
- 3.109 It also seems clear that guidance for headteachers and other teaching staff on how best to establish and monitor the impact of support staff and plan their professional development needs is lacking and that generally they are not aware or do not make use of the research evidence that has been produced in this area.
- 3.110 In this respect the survey of support staff produced some interesting findings on how effective they believe schools are at getting the best from them and what they believe to be the most rewarding aspects of their work. These can be seen in Annex 7.
- 3.111 When respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed whether their school was effective at getting the best from them there was an overall positive response to this statement with 64 per cent either strongly agreeing or somewhat agreeing, but a significant number (36 per cent) were either unsure (15 per cent) or disagreed to some degree (21 per cent).

### *Other Evidence*

3.112 Other evidence on impact that was collected during the research highlighted the following:

- Primary headteachers often made clear to local authority HR staff that support staff did not feel valued for the contributions they make because of their pay and conditions.
- If support staff were to gain HLTA status one of the criteria that had to be met was to demonstrate that they had achieved an impact upon pupils.
- One headteacher association suggested that in the situations where, under teacher direction, HLTAs do teach whole classes, this was driven by financial considerations and did not take account of the potential impact on pupils.
- HR local authority staff suggested that support staff were much more likely to be absent through short-term sickness than teaching staff and were currently looking into the reasons behind this.
- Estyn suggested that it has now become the norm for schools to use additional funding such as the *Pupil Development Grant* to employ support staff without considering if this is the best use of funding and if the money could not be spent more effectively in other ways.

## **4. Conclusions**

### **Deployment**

- 4.1 There has been a steady expansion in the number of support staff working in primary schools in Wales since 2000, although schools report that as a result of funding shortages the numbers are currently in decline.
- 4.2 Whilst support staff are now a large element of the workforce in primary schools, with most staff having been in employment in the same school for a relatively long period of time, there is still a strong dependency on grant funding to employ this workforce.
- 4.3 The main motivation for support staff in undertaking their role is to contribute to pupil learning and this is highly valued by schools.
- 4.4 The roles and responsibilities of support staff have increased considerably and now include 1-1 support, small group interventions and specialist interventions.
- 4.5 Many support staff (who are not HLTAs) are now being asked to undertake work, such as whole-class teaching, which lies outside of their job descriptions and current regulations.
- 4.6 The piecemeal and unplanned growth in the workforce has led to significant variations and inconsistencies in job titles, roles, responsibilities, gradings and levels of pay.
- 4.7 Most support staff do not feel able to manage their existing workloads effectively.
- 4.8 The roles and responsibilities of HLTAs has expanded and continues to do so, particularly in relation to whole-class teaching.
- 4.9 There are concerns that sometimes support staff focus on 'task completion' with pupils rather than stretching their learning and developing their skills as independent learners.
- 4.10 Whilst not the norm, there are examples of joint planning and collaborative teamwork taking place between teachers and support staff and this is one of the positive features of their work identified by support staff.

## **Professional Learning**

- 4.11 Whilst the level of qualifications held by support staff has improved over time, the research evidence indicates that many staff lack sufficiently high enough level qualifications for the roles they are undertaking.
- 4.12 Most support staff who responded to the survey had undertaken some form of professional learning in the last year with most of this school-based, provided by school staff and external providers and related to the main roles and responsibilities of support staff. Having appropriate time and access to funding were the main barriers to undertaking professional learning.
- 4.13 The importance of professional learning for support staff is widely recognised by support staff, stakeholders and some schools. Most support staff wish to develop their qualifications and expertise appropriate to their role and responsibilities and in areas such as ALN and digital technologies. Whilst many are interested in progression to HLTA status, a small minority are interested in becoming teachers.
- 4.14 Whilst most staff have undertaken some form of basic professional learning and opportunities for this are expanding, the extent to which this meets their developing needs, particularly in supporting learning and teaching and provides the quality required, is open to question. Provision of this type is now being increasingly offered by the support staff trade unions and by the Regional Education Consortia, but its uptake is still at an early stage of development.
- 4.15 The vision and leadership of the headteacher and governing body is critically important in deciding if support staff are offered the professional learning opportunities which are available. When this is not in place there is a significant variation in the take-up by support staff of available opportunities.
- 4.16 The self-motivation of support staff is currently critical to their decision to undertake professional learning because of a lack of entitlement and the lack of any career incentives.

## **Impact**

- 4.17 In some cases, assessments of the impact of support staff on pupil achievement are undertaken, but overall there is an absence of systematic and rigorous assessment of impact being undertaken in schools.
- 4.18 Whilst, it is widely recognised that support staff have a positive impact on reducing teacher workload, supporting and developing pupil wellbeing and social skills and links with the community, these areas also are not systematically and rigorously assessed.
- 4.19 Systematic appraisal and performance management of support staff, focused on the impact they have on pupils' achievement and wellbeing and which identifies their professional development needs, is insufficiently undertaken by schools.
- 4.20 The research identifies that insufficient guidance exists which can help teachers and headteachers to maximize the impact of support staff and that the findings of research undertaken in this area are generally not being utilised.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1 Welsh Government should explore the possibility of working with other interested parties to consider a national structure for support staff encompassing:

- Job titles, roles and responsibilities.
- Deployment.
- Gradings.
- Entitlement to professional development.
- Appraisal and performance management.

5.2 Welsh Government should explore the possibility of working with other interested parties to consider the feasibility of new/revised national guidance on:

- The most effective deployment of support staff.
- How their impact on quantitative and qualitative aspects of education can be maximised and captured.
- Their use in whole-class teaching.
- How their overuse in leading work with pupils can be avoided.

5.3 Consider inclusion in the finalised professional standards for teaching, leadership and assisting teaching an emphasis on the importance of joint planning and collaborative teamwork between teachers and support staff.

5.4 Encourage the expansion of the use of apprenticeships as an entry route for support staff and a means of them receiving work-based training.

5.5 Develop a national framework for the professional development of support staff in line with the National Approach to Professional Learning and which draws upon existing and future provision.

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## 7. Annexes

### Annex 1: Responses to Headteacher Survey

#### Annex 1.1: Headteacher Response by Local Authority

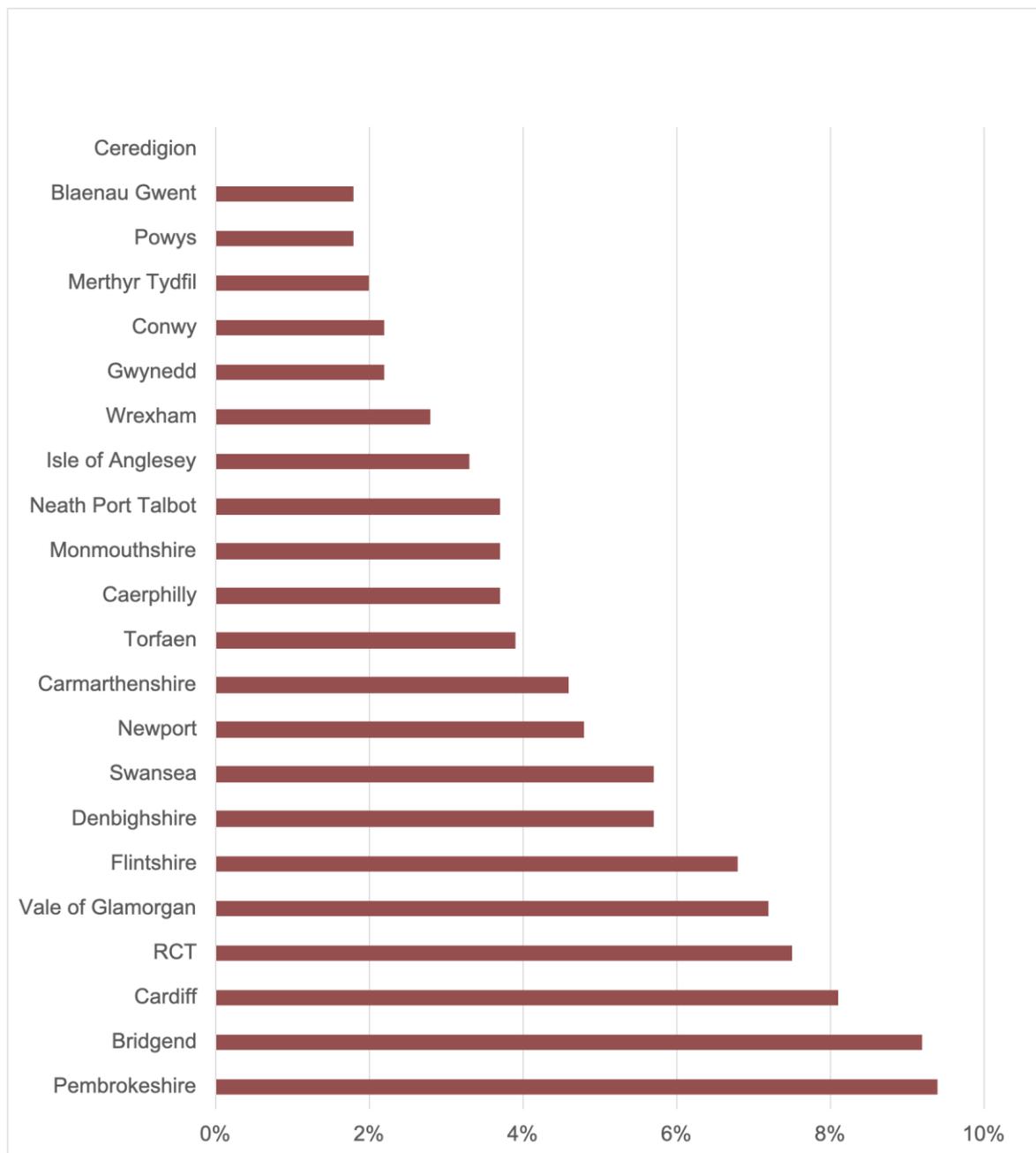
LA	%
Blaenau Gwent	2%
Bridgend	5%
Caerphilly	3%
Cardiff	4%
Carmarthenshire	4%
Ceredigion	1%
Conwy	6%
Denbighshire	2%
Flintshire	7%
Gwynedd	5%
Isle of Anglesey	5%
Merthyr Tydfil	1%
Monmouthshire	5%
Neath Port Talbot	2%
Newport	4%
Pembrokeshire	8%
Powys	7%
RCT	7%
Swansea	7%
Vale of Glamorgan	7%
Torfaen	2%
Wrexham	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Annex 1.2: Schools by LSWs and eFSM and size?**

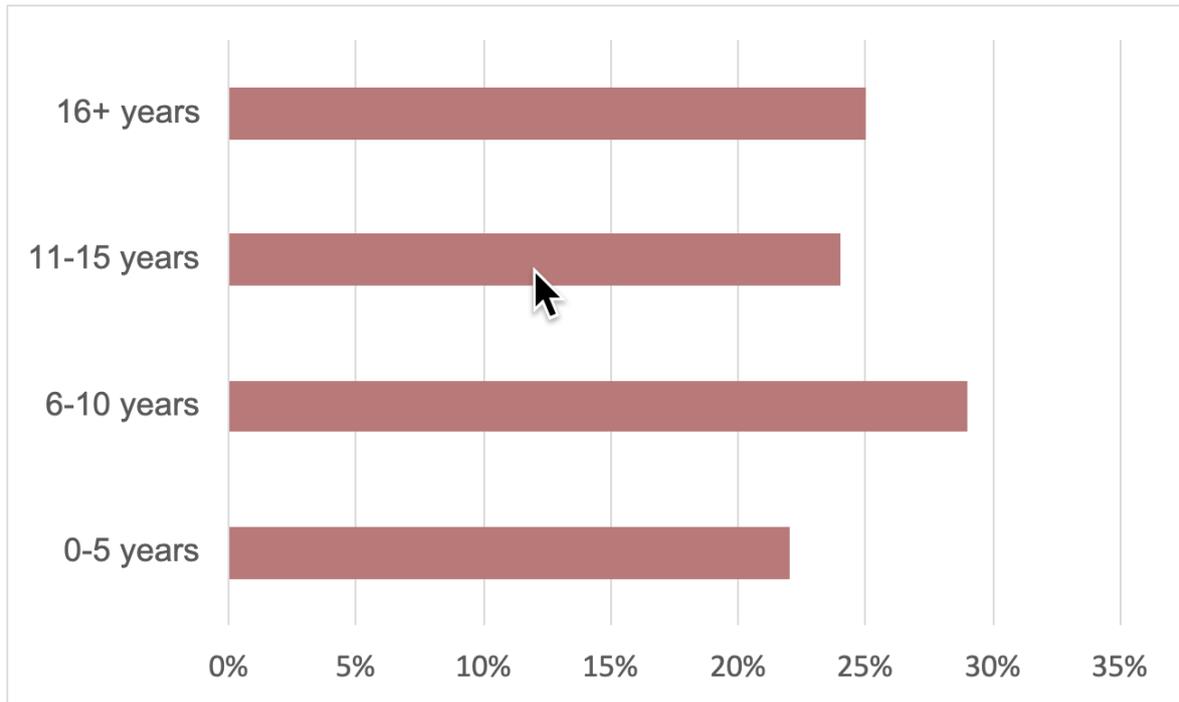
Can you please indicate the number of pupils in your school		less than 100	100-200	201-300	301-400	401+
How many LSWs are you responsible for in your school?	<b>1-5</b>	88%	24%	0%	5%	0%
	<b>6-10</b>	9%	57%	42%	0%	0%
	<b>11-15</b>	3%	11%	46%	33%	19%
	<b>16-20</b>	0%	7%	13%	33%	23%
	<b>20+</b>	0%	2%	0%	29%	58%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Can you please indicate your percentage level of pupils who are eligible for Free Schools Meals i...	<b>1-10</b>	58%	34%	27%	36%	19%
	<b>11-20</b>	26%	32%	35%	23%	23%
	<b>21-30</b>	13%	17%	21%	18%	42%
	<b>31-40</b>	0	6%	15%	18%	8%
	<b>41-50</b>	0	6%	2%	5%	4%
	<b>50+</b>	3%	4%	0%	0%	4%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## Annex 2: Responses to Support staff survey

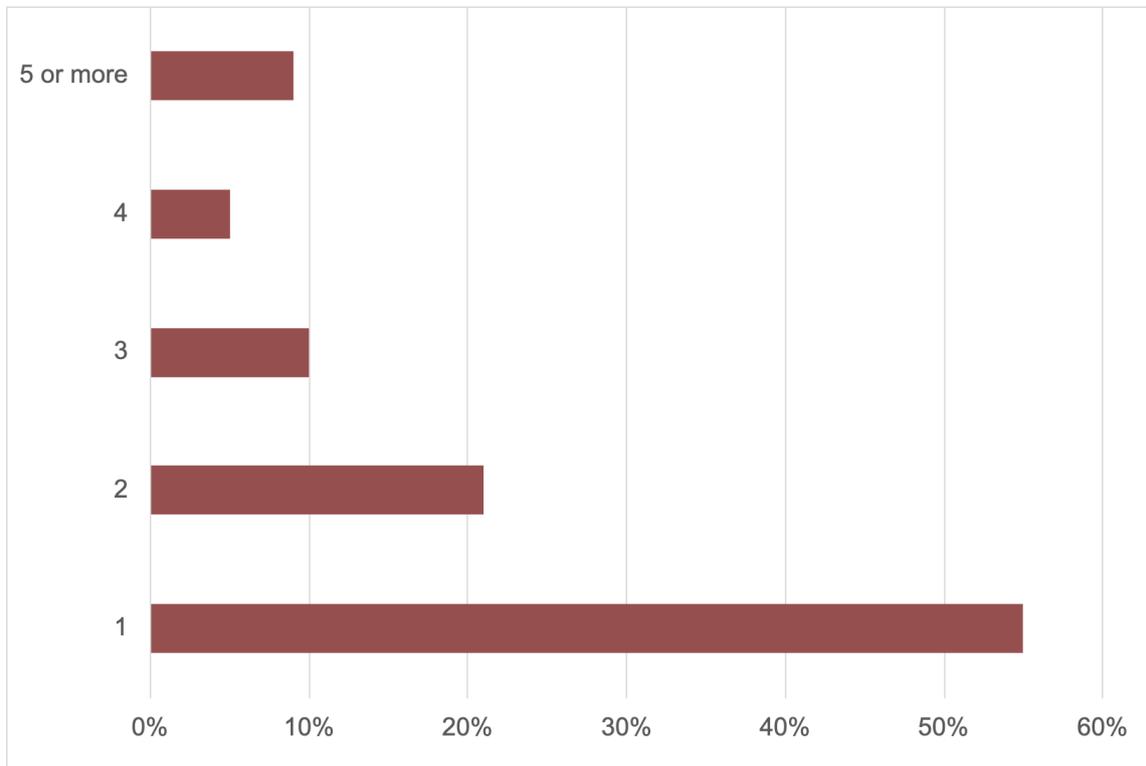
### Annex 2.1: Which local authority are you employed by?



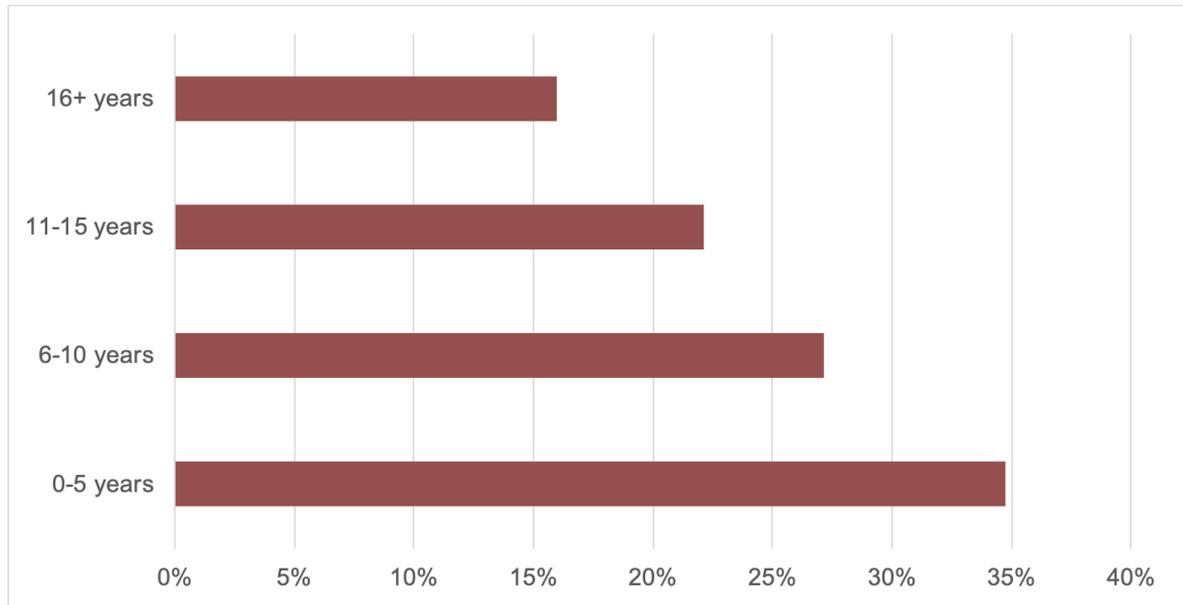
**Annex 2.2: How many years have you worked as a classroom-based learning support worker (LSW)?**



**Annex 2.3: How many schools have you worked in as a LSW?**



**Annex 2.4: How long have you been at your current school?**



### Annex 3 – Support staff survey responses

#### Annex 3.1 – Why did you become a learning support worker? (select all that apply)

Answer	%
I enjoy assisting teaching colleagues in advancing pupils' learning	34%
I like the work/life balance learning support work gives me	27%
I started as a volunteer and subsequently wanted to obtain a paid role	17%
I had previously worked in childcare but wanted to move into education	9%
I wanted the job security that a public sector job offered?	6%
Other (see below)	5%
I have gained Qualified Teacher Status but do not want to work in this role	2%
I have gained Qualified Teacher Status but have been unable to secure work as a qualified school teacher	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	

#### Annex 3.2- Other responses

Response	Total (% of 50)	Exemplar quotes
Working with children / vocation	36%	<p>“Love working with children and getting them up levels.”</p> <p>“I enjoy the job role and educating the children.”</p> <p>“To help pupils flourish and reach their full potential.”</p> <p>“A job I’ve always wanted to do.”</p> <p>“I enjoy working with children and being part of their overall educational development, seeing children achieve is a rewarding aspect of the job.”</p>
Route to teaching / gaining experience prior to and during initial teacher education (ITE)	10%	<p>“To decide if the teaching profession was for me.”</p> <p>“Eventually want to gain QTS.”</p> <p>“I am gaining relevant experience to assist me in my future career as a teacher.”</p> <p>“I am doing this job, while completing a degree in Primary Teaching.”</p>
Work-life balance / term-	8%	<p>“I wanted to work term-time only.”</p> <p>“Fits around my family.”</p>

time work / fits around family		"To concentrate on raising my own children."
NNEB or previous qualification (NNEB) or experience	8%	"I trained as an N.N.E.B 38 yrs ago and have always [worked] with children." "I had previous experience working with children in a social services setting."
Career change (non-voluntary)	4%	"I was a Nursery Nurse but got downgraded after job evaluation." "I feel I was driven out of my teaching post which I had loved, by a head who made my working life intolerable."
Career change (Voluntary)	4%	"Career change." "Roeddwn yn gweithio ym maes iechyd ond cefais anaf a rhaid rhoi'r gorau i'w swydd honno felly meddyliaias am newid gyrfa." <i>("I was working in the field of Health but I was injured and needed to give that job up and therefore thought of changing career.")</i>
Working with SEN / ALN	4%	"I wanted to work with hearing impaired." "my children both have ALN's and i wanted to use the skills i had learnt and be available for my own children outside school hours."
Miscellaneous	26%	"I want to put my A level Welsh to good use!" "It was a pathway I was encouraged to follow leaving school to higher education - NNEB certificate." "Help Polish children and their parents." "Went into A's supply for experience to gain my QTS but now I can't afford to be without a salary for a year to do my training." "It was the route I chose to come back to the workplace after having time off with my children." "Secured teaching assistant hours with a view to being also used as regular supply teacher that was at hand / on site."

## Annex 4 – Support staff survey responses

### Level and extent of employment

		How many years have you worked as a classroom based learning support worker (LSW)?					
		0-5	6-10	11-15	16+	%	Total
At which level is your contracted employment? (select one)	LSA/TA level 1	28	24	15	3	16%	70
	LSA/TA level 2	39	36	21	19	26%	115
	LSA/TA level 3	23	47	44	47	37%	161
	LSA/TA level 4	3	12	18	30	14%	63
	Other (please state)	3	11	8	10	7%	32
	Total	96	130	106	109		441
Is your employment as a learning support worker? (select one)	Permanent	39	71	55	62	51%	227
	Permanent term-time working	18	42	45	35	32%	140
	Supply	3	1	0	1	1%	5
	Temporary	18	6	2	1	6%	27
	Temporary term-time working	7	4	1	6	4%	18
	Voluntary	0	0	0	0	0%	0
	Annual rolling contract	9	4	3	3	4%	19
	Other (please state)	2	3	0	2	2%	7
	Total	96	131	106	110		443
Which of the following best describes your	I am employed full-time (30-35 hours +)	52	77	74	67	61%	270

employment? (select one)	as a learning support worker						
	I am employed part-time as learning support worker	44	54	33	41	39%	172

## Annex 5 – Support staff survey responses

If keen to gain additional qualifications what would they be and why?

Qualification / area /level	Count	Why? Exemplar quotations from responses
SEN ALN and / or specific needs (e.g. autism and dyslexia)	52	<p><i>“because I work as a one to one, it would be good to keep up to date on different need some and the agencies that help”</i></p> <p><i>“as more and more children are coming to us with SEN”</i></p>
HLTA	41	<p><i>“I would love to become HLTA as not only will it benefit me and my knowledge but also the school, updating and expanding my own learning.”</i></p>
HLTA and QTS / teaching degree	17	<p><i>“improved salary and career development to become a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Continue on to complete my undergraduate degree and then follow on with a PGCE with the aim to work as a teacher in Wales.”</i></p>
Any (qualification available)	15	<p><i>“Anything that furthers my knowledge base and can help improve my practise.”</i></p> <p><i>“Any qualification that would support the children in my care</i></p> <p><i>Anything to help me progress in my career.”</i></p>
Degree / BA Hons	9	<p><i>“To be better equipped with skills that are required”</i></p> <p><i>“To improve my ability and knowledge after working for 28 years as a nursery nurse it would be nice to be able to achieve further qualifications. I always fund my own learning. However, finances are not readily available to me this year.”</i></p> <p><i>“to develop career opportunities where the I can earn a real living wage.”</i></p>
Level 3	8	
QTS	7	
Welsh	7	<p><i>“to achieve a greater understanding of this language when teaching it”</i></p>
Foundation degree	6	<p><i>“To better myself within my role”</i></p> <p><b>BUT</b></p> <p><i>“I am not offered much training as little is suitable because of financial constraints plus I have achieved a lot and nothing much is suitable. I would love to do a Fd in the future but funding is a problem”</i></p>

		<i>"I would like to begin a foundation Degree but financially it is not possible"</i>
Level 4	5	
Level 5	3	
Counselling	3	
Outdoor learning / Forest schools	2	"to be able to use our outdoor spaces to maximum advantage."
ICT / IT Nurture Speech and language Restorative approaches Nurturing Emotional / behavioural Supporting speech and language Doctorate	1	

## Annex 6 – Support staff survey responses

### Annex 6.1 additional roles undertaken by support staff – open responses

Covering classes by myself for PPA ( level 4)
Whole class covering PPA
Worked in a unit of 60 pupils - 2 classes run by 2 LSO, with 1 teacher managing overall unit
Admin
Covering whole class teaching for PPA and management time. Responsible for display, administration of classroom etc.
Display
ALN literacy intervention responsibility. All related planning, tracking, recording, assessing. Work on my own with between 1 and 9 children at a time. Frequently required to take half a class into another classroom to duplicate what, is happening in the classroom but with, mostly, less able children. Up to 15 children. Rarely take a whole class.
Taking the lead role within class in the absence of the teacher. For example, if the teacher is on a course, in a meeting or on PPA, rather than paying a supply teacher approx ~£100 a day, I take on the role, costing the school approximately ~£19 extra a day, a big saving compared to supply teaching but as someone who earns a pro rata wage, I cannot refuse to do this as I need the extra income.
Teaching Welsh and music
covering teachers PPA
Food prep, cleaning tasks,
Taking groups out to deliver intervention programmes the school has for basic skill and SEN pupils.
Mainly 1:1 special needs
ALN intervention co-ordinator
ELSA sessions
Whole class support without teacher present
Whole class support without teacher present with no financial benefit
Whole class teaching with no support

All aspects of running a classroom
Whole class support without teacher present
Classroom cover, covering illness, PPA etc.
Teaching whole class without the teacher present.
Whole class cover for absent teachers without assistance from another adult
Assessment, Pastoral care,
displays laminating book binding lunchtime /break duties supporting with xmas concerts
Whole class support, covering PPA, one afternoon a week.
Communication support
Whole class teaching
Covering PPA
Covering the class when teacher on papa, absent. Also a RWI mentor providing support and team teaching for staff, writing of IEP for children I work with.
BSL Communicator
Teaching groups by myself
whole class teaching covering PPA
Whole class PPA cover
Marking work
run nurture class
admin-based tasks related to the classroom
Expectations to perform tasks for free
Whole class PPA cover
PPA cover
Welsh lessons

Family group work originally named language and play
Admin work for the classroom, assessment and recording of outcomes.
Covering PPA
Whole class teaching as level 4. Supervise children while they are playing. Import teacher in all aspects of daily work. Support TAs. Run intervention programs and help oversee them with ALNCO. Support IT with children and staff and do insects for staff.
Communications Comity, Website Designer, Events Organiser
Whole class support without teacher present
Counselling pupils with anxiety
PPA and teacher relief with no support
Covering ppa and providing teacher cover whenever needed.
interventions, covering PPA with another LSA, break time duties, lunch time pupil support
Leading the learning of whole classes
Cover teacher
Whole class cover. Without teacher
Whole class teaching without teacher present.
delivering outdoor learning
Engaging parents and HLTA whole class teaching
PPA cover & cover some teacher absences, implementing speech & language therapy programmes, leading and implementing intervention programmes for catch up pupils and those with ALN, playground duties, planning and preparing lessons with the teachers, lead first aider, keeping the school website up to date
Full time support for ALNCo
Cover classes for teachers who are ill/planned absence from school - like courses or watching get their child's sports day or teachers illness. Yard duty. First Aider.
I have been required to do HLTA work for more than 2 years even when my role as a nursery nurse was taken from me and a pay cut occurred and my role put to level 3.

Whole class teaching unsupported
PPA cover and Emotional learning support programmes.
librarian
Wellbeing & nurture
PPA cover
Emotional Learning Support Assistant (ELSA)
Changing children when they were themselves, clean up sick, fill toilet rolls and paper in machine when caretaker hasn't refilled them, helping the dinner lady if someone is off ill, prepare fruit breaktime, fix photocopiers, you name it we do it
Planning for independent continuous provision.
PPA cover
Whole class support with teacher not present also covering as HLTA and for absent members of staff and staff on courses
Cover supervisor/HLTA for PPA cover
Whole class teaching to cover PPA with no teacher or TA present. I object to this role being expected to be a part of my job.
asked to look after farm animals kept on the premises including feeding them and cleaning them out. Administrative work relating to my work within the classroom, preparing and giving out drinks and snacks, supervising the nursery children's lunch time, writing up activity planning sheets, maintaining the upkeep and presentation of the classroom eg painting and decorating, some cleaning.
Filling toilet paper, soap, answering the phone, standing in as lunch time supervisor, attending concert and events outside working hours
Take the whole class without teacher present 2 days each week
Teaching a subject for a lesson a week no teacher present
Testing children weekly And termly.
Assessment planning, carrying out and review of intervention work
Nurture group provision

Running classes writing courses
I am also an ELSA emotional Literacy Support Assistant
SALT assistant
Whole class without teacher present
Covering classes
Planning & recording of work for groups of learners in KS1
PPA cover
Whole class without teacher present
Completing assessments, reports, referral forms, children's baseline and data for progression. Whole class management without teacher support. Management of Isa's within the class. Organisation of children, staff, activities within the classroom. Responsible for children's books and marking. Attend staff meetings and provide feedback to Isa's. Arrange link up sessions and keep links with local flying start. Prepare, set up and clear away daily provision. Enhance the classroom with themed activities and focused skills. Report to parents. Deal with parental issues. Complete risk assessments. Provide feedback from training.
Run after school clubs voluntarily, take school council meetings, do planning and assessments, parents evenings, write children's reports, attend meetings to discuss ALN
whole class with no teacher
first aide
PPA cover without teacher present
Eco coordinator, family engagement officer, investors in families portfolio evidence
I cover PLS every week
Cover teachers while on P.P.A.
A full time PPA role
Cover supervisor
Delivery of the classroom teaching is split 50/50 between the teacher and myself with half of the children the remaining children are supported with independent learning in the outdoor area by the whoever is not teaching at the time.

ELSA
some whole class teaching/supervision
Cover PPA
Teaching the whole class without the teacher present
Lunchtime support
Covering class when the teacher pops out
Whole class without teacher present
Whole class without teacher
Sorting lost property/library books, First aid duties, supervising lunch times, break times, covering classes in teachers absence including teaching from the weekly planning, sorting display boards and putting them up, cleaning and tidying some areas of the school,
Teaching
Covering PPA, delivering lessons, teaching outdoors, maintaining outdoor learning areas
Cymryd dosbarth yn absenoldeb yr athrawes
Whole class teaching without a teacher present
PPA
Cover supervisor
Whole class teaching without teacher present and without any support to myself
ELSA and Thrive Practitioner
I deliver lessons to reception class, year 1 & year 2 without the class teacher present
Delivering Outdoor Learning/Forest School to every class, Reading Intervention and Thrive Intervention, Eco Coordinator
PPA class cover
Whole with and without LSW support
leading assembly once a week

Integrating pupils into mainstream schools
Whole class support with teacher absent
Whole class support without teacher also
HLTA covering classes
Planning ICT lessons and delivering them to each class within the school
Whole class support with no teacher present
Whole class teaching when teacher not present (at least 3-4 hrs a week)
I plan and teach art and DT lessons to all ks2 classes
Cover classes in teachers absence. Delivering the planning, marking books etc
Forest school leader
Learning strategies to new assistants
Full classes PPA
Speech and language therapy
Read Write Inc with a group of 8-10 yr 2 children daily
Dinner lady
Whole class teaching, responsibility for nursery class, assessing, writing reports, parents meetings
PPA cover one afternoon a week also supply cover when class teacher absent.
Arwain y dysgu yn y dosbarth Derbyn a Blwyddyn 3 pan mae'r athro arferol ar gyfnod CPA
whole class support without teacher present, playground supervision, assisting with personal care, assisting on an unpaid basis with concerts and fetes etc..
covering class without teacher present
supporting children's emotional needs ELSA going on residential trips
playtime duty, cleaning, toileting, covering classes
Exam invigilator- Marking on National Numeracy Tests and recording of the data.

School council
Emotional learning support assistant
Teaching the whole class on my own
Individual start
Regularly take whole classes planned by myself

## Annex 7 – Support staff survey responses

Annex 7.1 To what extent do you agree to the following statement: I think my school is effective in getting the best from me and other LSWs.

Answer	%		Count
Strongly agree (SA)	27%	64%	134
Somewhat agree (A)	37%		187
Neither agree nor disagree (N)	15%	15%	77
Somewhat disagree (D)	15%	21%	77
Strongly disagree (SD)	6%		30
Total	100%		505

Annex 7.2 What aspects of your role do you find most rewarding? (maximum three choices)

	%
Supporting/engaging learners and seeing them progress	31%
Supporting learners with special and/or additional learning needs	19%
Trying new and innovative methods of teaching and learning	14%
Working with others (within or outside your school)	11%
Sharing good practice	10%
Developing yourself as a LSW	9%
Interacting with parents or guardians	5%
Other (please state)	1%
Total	100%